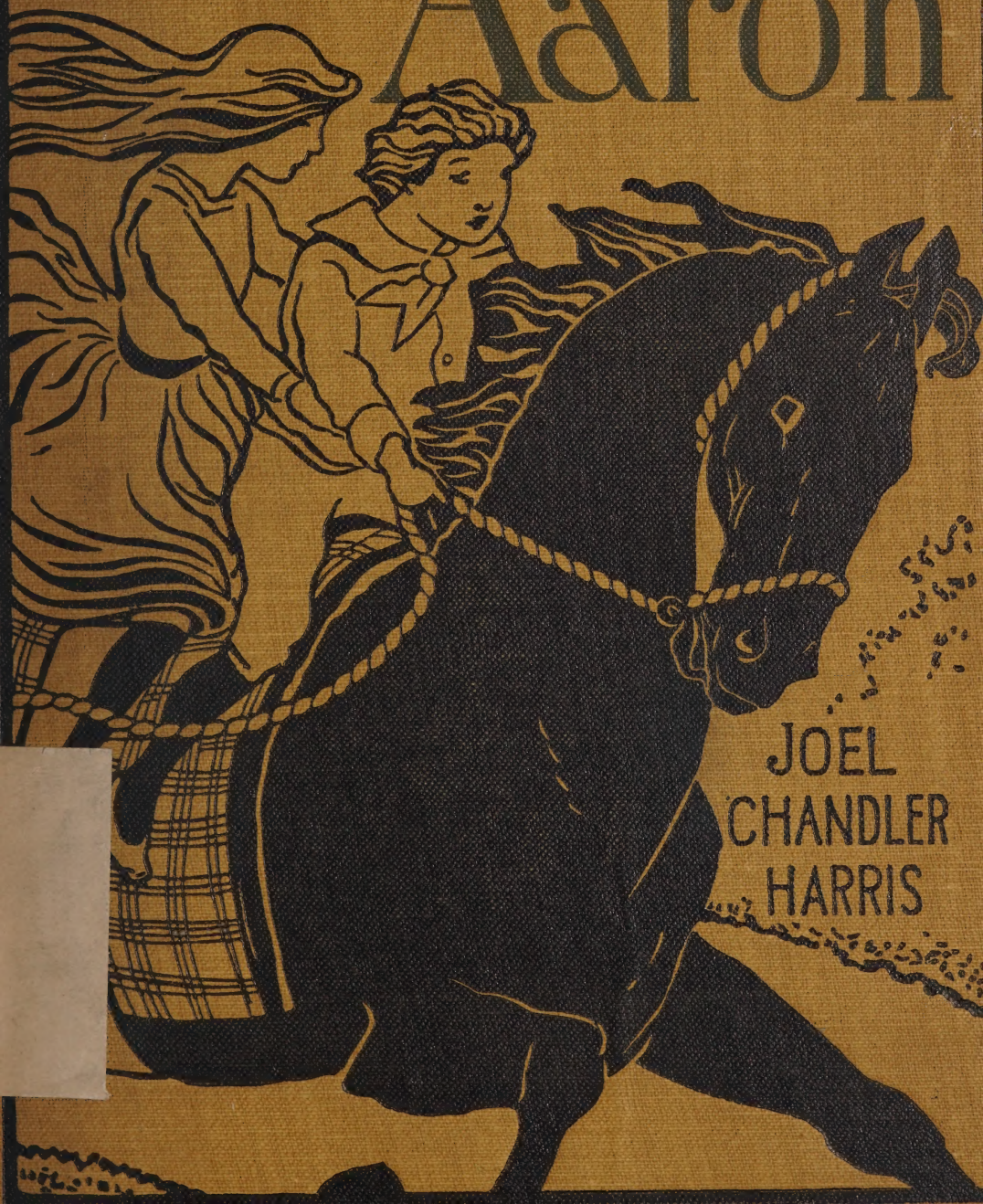


The Story of Aaron



JOEL
CHANDLER
HARRIS

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MR. RABBIT AT HOME. A Sequel to Little Mr. Thimblefinger and His Queer Country. Illustrated by OLIVER HERFORD.

THE STORY OF AARON (SO-NAMED) THE SON OF BEN ALI. Told by his Friends and Acquaintances. Illustrated by OLIVER HERFORD.

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TALES OF THE HOME FOLKS IN PEACE AND WAR. Illustrated.

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DRUSILLA FELL ON THE GROUND IN A HEAP (Page 23)

The Story of Aaron

(SO NAMED)

The Son of Ben Ali

TOLD BY HIS FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES

BY

JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS

AUTHOR OF "UNCLE REMUS," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY OLIVER HERFORD



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THE STORY OF AARON.

I.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE ANIMALS.

THE story of how Buster John, Sweetest Susan, and Drusilla found their way into Mr. Thimblefinger's queer country has been set forth, and many of the tales they heard there have been told. All of this matter has been put into a book, where the curious may now find it. This being so, it is not necessary to go over it again. Imitation is bad enough, but repetition is worse. It is enough to say, therefore, that these children whose names have been mentioned lived on a large plantation in Middle Georgia, in that part of the country where cotton grows, where the mocking-birds sing in the orchards, and where the roses bloom in the open air from April to November.

There is nothing tropical or even semi-tropical

in Middle Georgia. The trees and shrubs and all of the wild flowers are much the same as those that grow in New England. The summers are not so hot nor the winters so long and cold in Middle Georgia as they are farther to the north ; but warm weather lasts longer, and that is the reason that cotton and sugar-cane and watermelons can be raised in Middle Georgia in the open air.

The plantation on which the children lived appeared to be just like all the other plantations round about, but the youngsters had already found out that it was entirely different from the rest in some respects. So far as they knew, and they had made careful inquiries, there was no Mr. Thimblefinger on any one of the neighboring plantations, and there was no road leading from any other plantation to Mr. Thimblefinger's queer country.

On Sundays when there was a big meeting going on at Mt. Zion church, and the congregation carried dinner in hamper baskets, Buster John and Sweetest Susan and Drusilla (their negro nurse and playmate) took pains to inquire among the children they met there if any of them had ever seen Mr. Thimblefinger. The

reply was that they had not only never seen him, but had never even heard of him before. This made Buster John feel more important than ever, and Sweetest Susan said she was surprised and sorry that the other children should have failed to see Mr. Thimblefinger, and they so near his queer country, too. As for Drusilla, she declared that it made no difference, anyhow, "Kaze ef dey wuz ter see 'im wid der naked eyes dey would n't b'lieve dey seed 'im." But the neighbor-children said nothing, they simply stared at one another and concluded that Buster John and Sweetest Susan and Drusilla were trying to make fun of them.

If the neighbor-children had been wise, they would have asked some questions about Mr. Thimblefinger, and then they would have found out that the Abercrombie place, as it was called, was different from all the other plantations they had ever heard of, being the scene of some of Mr. Thimblefinger's performances, and containing within its boundaries the gateway to Mr. Thimblefinger's queer country, which lies next door to the world.

Those who have taken the trouble to read the

book in which the stories told by Mr. Thimblefinger and his friends are partly set forth will remember that when Buster John, Sweetest Susan, and Drusilla were on the point of returning home, they were asked if they knew a man named Aaron. To which Buster John replied that he ought to know Aaron, since he was foreman of the field-hands. Whereupon Buster John was told that Aaron was the Son of Ben Ali, and knew the language of animals. "If you want to learn this language," said Mr. Rabbit, "go to Aaron, Son of Ben Ali, take him by his left hand, bend the thumb back, and with your right forefinger make a cross mark on it. Should Aaron pay no attention to it, repeat the sign. The third time he will know it."

But the minds of the children were so busy thinking of what they had seen and heard that they forgot all about the matter. Once when Buster John chanced to remember what he had been told, Aaron happened to be ill in bed. Another time, when the children determined to find out something about the language of the animals, they found that Aaron was away from home. He had gone with the wagons to Au-

gusta, one hundred miles away, to sell the year's crop of cotton. Thus, in one way and another, Buster John, Sweetest Susan, and Drusilla were many long months older when they sought and found Aaron in his cabin than they were when they made their last visit to Mr. Thimblefinger's queer country.

Now Aaron was the most remarkable slave in all the country round, not because he was tall and finely formed, nor because he carried himself as proudly as a military officer, but because he had a well-shaped head, a sharp black eye, thin lips, and a nose prominent, but not flat. Another remarkable feature was his hair, which, instead of being coarse and kinky, was fine, thick, wavy, glossy, and as black as jet.

The negroes on the place seemed to be very much afraid of him. This would not have been strange if Aaron had been an old man; negroes always stand in awe of those who are very old; but he was not above forty, and seemed to be even younger. There were many stories current about Aaron, which the negroes told to each other in whispers when their cabin fires burned low. One was that he was a conjurer, and in league with

the "old boy." This was because Aaron refused to associate with his fellow servants on terms of equality, and would allow them to take no liberties with him.

Another story was that he was of Indian blood. But he had no Indian characteristic, except that of serenity. His color was dark brown. He was both quick in his movements and fluent in his speech, but his talk was different from that of the negroes. Still another story about Aaron was that he was very dangerous. It was whispered that he had killed several people, a number of women and children among them. This story grew out of the fact that he alone could manage Timoleon, the big black stallion. This horse, wild in his ways and fierce of temper, was as gentle as a dog in Aaron's hands, and followed him about as the chicken follows the mother hen.

It was one Saturday, when Buster John, Sweetest Susan, and Drusilla went to Aaron's cabin. On the plantation there was a half-holiday every Saturday, if crop work was not pressing, and sometimes when the corn was laid by the negroes had a whole holiday. This was the case now. The children saw Aaron go into his



BUSTER JOHN WENT FORWARD AND KNOCKED

cabin and half close the door after him. Buster John went forward and knocked. There was no invitation to "come in," as there would have been at any other cabin in the negro quarters. Instead, Aaron came to the door, pulled it open and looked out with something like a frown on his face. But he smiled when he saw the children.

"Oh, you?" he said with a laugh. "I did n't know who. Jump in!"

There was a step lacking among those leading to the door, so he seized Buster John by the hand and swung him into the room. Then he lifted Sweetest Susan a little more carefully, but ignored Drusilla altogether. This was not regarded by Drusilla as a slight, for she was not anxious to be touched by him. She was not even anxious to go into the cabin, but her curiosity was more powerful than her vague fears, and so, after a while, she followed the children in.

Aaron, still smiling, lifted Buster John high in the air. "Le' me see; like enough you'd weigh ninety poun'."

"Eighty-seven," replied Buster John.

“Heavy! heavy!” exclaimed Aaron. “One time I toted your uncle all night long. He was sixteen-year old and weighed fifty poun’.”

“That was Uncle Crotchet, who is dead,” said Buster John.

“Yes. Folks named him Little Crotchet,” Aaron remarked.

“That was ever so long ago,” suggested Sweetest Susan.

“Fifteen year,” said Aaron.

Meanwhile Buster John pretended to be playing with Aaron’s left hand. Finally he seized the thumb, bent it back as far as it would go, and made a cross-mark on it. Aaron playfully jerked his hand away, but Buster John caught it again, bent the thumb back and again made the cross-mark. Apparently Aaron paid no attention to this, for he failed to take his hand away. Once more, and for the third time, Buster John bent the thumb back and made the cross-mark. At once Aaron put him gently aside and went to the door and closed it. Then he turned to Buster John and said in a whisper : —

“How come? Where you been? Who told you?”

Buster John was so much surprised that he hesitated a moment, and then began to reply in a tone of voice somewhat louder than usual.

"Sh-sh! talk low!" whispered Aaron. "Did somebody tell you to do that?"

"Yes," said Buster John.

"Round anywhere by the spring?" Aaron was very cautious in putting his questions. Apparently he wanted to make himself perfectly sure.

"Yes," cried Sweetest Susan. "The spring is the gate, you know."

"She, too?" asked Aaron, nodding his head toward Drusilla.

"Of course," said Buster John.

"I dunner how come I can't go whar de yuthers does," remarked Drusilla.

"All right — all right!" exclaimed Aaron. Then he counted them. "One — two — three! And now you've come to me. What for?"

"We want to learn how to talk with the animals," said Buster John.

Aaron, who had been frowning a little, seemed to be relieved. The frown disappeared.

"Oho," he cried, "is that all? 'T ain't much,

yet it's a heap. You'll hear lots of sassy talk. Sometimes, maybe, you'll have to stop up your ears."

"We won't mind that," remarked Buster John.

"Maybe not," said Aaron. Then he went to a large wooden chest that sat in the corner, unlocked it, and presently brought forth a bundle of red cloth. This he placed on the floor and sat beside it, motioning the children to sit on the floor in a circle around the bundle. He unrolled the cloth until he came to an oval-shaped mirror. The frame was heavy and richly carved, and shone as bright as new silver shines.

Aaron placed the beautiful mirror carefully on the floor, face up. Then he threw the red cloth over his head and over the children's heads. If any one had been peeping through the chinks of the chimney he would have been very much puzzled by what he saw and heard. He would have seen the red cloth bobbing up and down as if those underneath were bowing their heads back and forth, and he would have heard muffled exclamations of wonder, the loudest of all being Drusilla's involuntary cry: —



AARON SHOWING THE MIRROR

"Don't dat beat all!"

The children never told what happened under the cloth, nor what they saw in the mirror. When Aaron rose to his feet, the cloth still over his head, he made a few movements with his arms, and lo! there was the bundle in his hands with the mirror wrapped in its folds.

Sweetest Susan looked at Buster John. "Was n't it easy?" she cried. "Did you ever see anything as bright" — She would have said more, but Aaron touched her gently on the arm and put his finger on his lips. At that moment a gander in the spring lot began to scream.

"What did he say?" asked Aaron, looking at Drusilla.

"He say, 'I'm gwine atter water — water — who wanten go?'"

Aaron seemed satisfied with the answer. He replaced the bundle in the chest, turned the key and then leaned against the rude mantel shelf he had nailed over his fireplace.

"You think I'm a nigger, don't you?" He turned to Buster John.

"Of course," said the youngster without hesitation. "What else are you?"

"I'll show you." From his pocket Aaron drew a little package — something wrapped in soft leather and securely tied. It was a memorandum book. Opening this small book, Aaron held it toward Buster John, saying "What's here?"

"It looks like pothooks," replied the boy, frankly.

"Ain't a word in it I can't read," said Aaron.

"Read some of it, please," pleaded Sweetest Susan.

Thereupon Aaron began to read from the book in a strange tongue, the tone of his voice taking on modulations the children had never heard before.

"I ain't never hear no jabber like dat," said Drusilla.

"What sort of talk is it?" asked Buster John.

"'T ain't no creetur talk," remarked Drusilla; "I know dat mighty well."

"It's the talk of Ben Ali," said Aaron — "Ben Ali, my daddy. Every word here was put down by him."

"Why, I've heard grandpa talk about uncle Ben Ali," suggested Buster John.

Aaron nodded. "Many a time. Your grandpa, my master, tried to buy my daddy, but Ben Ali was worth too much. I went to see him with my master twice a year till he died. He was no nigger."

"What then?" Buster John asked.

"Arab — man of the desert — slave hunter — all put down here," said Aaron, tapping the little book with his finger.

The children were anxious to hear more about Ben Ali, the Arab — Ben Ali the slave hunter, who had himself become a slave. There was not much to tell, but that little was full of interest as Aaron told it, sitting in his door, the children on the steps below him. For the most part the book was a diary of events that had happened to Ben Ali after he landed in this country, being written in one of the desert dialects; but the first few pages told how the Arab chief happened to be a slave.

Ben Ali was the leader of a band that made constant war on some of the African tribes in the Senegambian region. With their captives, this band of Arabs frequently pushed on to the Guinea coast and there sold them to the slave

traders. These excursions continued until, on one occasion, the Arabs chanced to clash with a war-loving tribe, which was also engaged in plundering and raiding its neighbors. The meeting was unexpected to the Arabs, but not to the Africans. The Arabs who were left alive were led captive to the coast and there sold with other prisoners to slave traders. Among them was Ben Ali, who was then not more than thirty years old. With the rest, he was brought to America, where he was sold to a Virginian planter, fetching a very high price. Along with him, in the same ship, was an Arab girl, and she was also bought by the planter. Nothing was said in the diary in regard to the history of this girl, except that she became Ben Ali's wife, and bore him a son and a daughter. The son was Aaron, so named. The daughter died while yet a child.

These things Aaron told the children, little by little and in a rambling way, begging Buster John and Sweetest Susan to say nothing about the matter to any other person, and threatening Drusilla with uplifted finger that if she opened her mouth about it he would put "the misery"

on her. Drusilla had seen negroes who were the victims of "the misery" — which is the plantation name of the spell that conjurers put on people, and she declared over and over again that she would n't tell — "crossing her heart" to show that she meant what she said.

"Can we talk with the animals sure enough — the horses, the cows, the sheep, the dogs, and the hogs?" asked Buster John.

Aaron smiled as he answered: "A little bit now, more pretty soon. The sheep — I don't know. Sheep don't talk much around me. But the others are talking all the time. You must watch all the motions they make, shutting the eye, switching the tail, flopping the ear, stamping the foot — all part of the talk."

"When shall we try?" asked Buster John.

"Right after dinner," replied Aaron; "we'll go see old Timoleon."

"Timoleon!" cried Sweetest Susan, in dismay.

Aaron laughed and nodded his head. "We'll take him out the stable and see what he says. Timoleon good talker."

"Oh, I'm afraid to go!" cried Sweetest Susan.

"Mamma told me never to go near Timoleon's stable."

"I'll tell you de plain trufe," said Drusilla vehemently, "I would n't go up dar in dat fiel' whar dat hoss is — I would n't go dar, not fer money. Ain't I done see 'im jump on a nigger man an' tar de cloze off'n 'im? Uh-uh! you don't ketch me up dar!"

"Little Missy will go with me," remarked Aaron. Then he pointed to Drusilla. "You go or stay, but, look out! No talk!"

"I'll set on de fence an' see de hoss eat 'em up," suggested Drusilla, by way of a compromise.

"She'll go if I do," said Sweetest Susan.

"You mus' n't be agwine, den," was Drusilla's comment.

Aaron looked at the girl so severely that she shrank back.

"Don't mind Drusilla," said Sweetest Susan. "She does n't mean anything she says, except when she asks for something to eat."

"After dinner we'll go see Timoleon. If he seems like he's in good humor," Aaron explained, "we'll bring him out. If he has been fretting, we'll let him stay."

This was perfectly satisfactory to the children, especially to Buster John.

They went to play, but they only pretended to play. All they could do was to discuss what they had already seen and heard, and what they hoped to see and hear. Time seemed to pass very slowly. They sat down and talked, and then walked about and talked, but still it was not dinner time. They would have become very impatient indeed had not Buster John chanced to hear the big gray rooster call out to the yellow hen : —

“Run, run, run ! Here’s a bug !”

The yellow hen went running, but just as she reached the gray rooster he turned and walked away with great dignity, saying: “Come on, let’s go ; come on.”

“I might have known it,” complained the yellow hen ; “you are like all the rest of the roosters. A respectable hen can’t depend on anything you say.”

“Come on, come on,” said the big gray rooster, strutting along, “I was just trying to get you away from that one-eyed dominicker. He’s not fit company for you to associate with.”

"Hoity-toity!" cried the yellow hen. "And didn't I see you this morning scratching your toes off for the Friesland pullet?"

Buster John and Sweetest Susan laughed heartily at this, but Drusilla was very serious.

"I dunno which de wuss," she cried, "chickens er folks."

After that, time no longer hung heavy on the children's hands. When the dinner bell rang, Buster John and Sweetest Susan were on hand promptly, with their faces washed and their hair combed. They were so anxious to get through their dinner that they ate rapidly, and this attracted the attention of their mother, who wanted to know what they had been doing to make them so hungry. The only satisfaction she got was a request to "Please, ma'm, make haste and have some dinner fixed for Drusilla."

This was very soon done, and in a little while the children were ready to go with Aaron to see Timoleon.

II.

A RIDE ON THE BLACK STALLION.

AARON was not ready as soon as the children were, but they waited for him with lamblike patience, considering their eagerness. Finally Aaron came out of his cabin and waved his hand as a signal that he was ready. The children ran to him, and together they went to the barn, where Timoleon had his stable. This barn had once been the corn crib. It was built of stout logs, hewn square and mortised together, and was in the middle of a five-acre field that had once been in cultivation, but was now overrun with Bermuda grass. Here Timoleon reigned in solitude, except when Aaron was with him. In this stable he remained securely imprisoned, save when Aaron took him out for exercise.

Timoleon was a horse renowned throughout the country — renowned for his victories on the race track and for his vicious temper. Even in his old age he was fleet and fierce, more danger-

ous, people said, than a tiger, and stronger than a lion. Fierce and strong, he was also beautiful. His coat glistened in the sun like satin. His mane was flowing and heavy, his tail long and full. His neck and shoulders were thick and powerful; his head tapering to the muzzle, his ears small and in constant motion, as when the night wind stirs the leaves of the willow; his nostrils red and flexible, and all his motions quick and graceful.

As Aaron and the children approached the stable, they heard Timoleon pounding against the heavy logs with his feet.

"I'm gwine back!" cried Drusilla. "He tryin' ter git out now."

But she kept along with the rest.

"What is the matter with him?" asked Sweetest Susan.

"He's fretting," replied Aaron — "fretting or playing."

He went to the stable door and unlocked it, saying "What now?"

"Son of Ben Ali, what have I done?" cried Timoleon. "To-day I go hungry because the corn is on the cob, to-morrow I'll be foundered

because the corn is shelled. Is it, then, nothing to you that I am old and my teeth are bad? What have I done? As for the fodder, it is full of dust. To put my nose in it is to cough all night. In the desert, I have been told an old horse has new rice and cracked barley."

Buster John looked at Sweetest Susan, and Sweetest Susan looked at Buster John. They were too much astonished to say anything.

"Even so, Grandson of Abdallah," said Aaron, "what says the sun on the wall above your trough? Does it stand at the dinner hour? Why grumble, then, about corn on the cob that I have saved for the grunter?"

"What is the Grunting Pig to me, Son of Ben Ali? Or the sun on the wall? The dinner hour of those who are hungry comes best when it comes quickest. I have hurt my teeth on your nubbins. Take them away."

Saying this, Timoleon snorted contemptuously. Then suddenly he gave a loud snort of surprise and anger. His quick and restless eye had caught sight of Sweetest Susan's dress through a crack in the door.

"Son of Ben Ali," he said, "what is this? You are not alone."

"No, Grandson of Abdallah, I have brought three of my friends," replied Aaron.

"Who are they, Son of Ben Ali?"

"Two grandchildren of the White-haired Master and their servant."

"Why have they come?"

"As I have touched your knee, so they have touched my thumb. Once, twice, thrice."

Timoleon turned from the door, walked to the far end of his stable, and then returned.

"The grandchildren of the White-haired Master are wise," he said.

"So it seems," replied Aaron.

"Then let me touch them with my nose, so that hereafter I may know them."

Aaron opened the door and Timoleon strode out. He had on neither halter nor bridle, and the children shrank and cowered behind Aaron.

"Son of Ben Ali, what does this mean?" asked Timoleon.

"It means that they are children who have heard that the Grandson of Abdallah is a savage beast," replied Aaron.

Timoleon with lowered head went to the children and pressed his muzzle gently against

the shoulder of each — against Buster John first, Sweetest Susan next, and Drusilla last. They were all frightened, but Drusilla's terror was such that her face, black as it was, took on an ashen hue. To make matters worse, Timoleon snorted suddenly and loudly when he pressed his nose on her shoulder. She gave a piercing scream, and fell on the ground in a heap. Timoleon sprang back as though an attack had been made on him. It was all so comical that Aaron laughed, and Buster John and Sweetest Susan relieved the strain on their feelings by joining him boisterously — almost hysterically. Drusilla, hearing this, rose to her feet with anger in her eyes.

“I dunner what you-all white chillun laugh-in’ at. Ef you speck I’m gwimeter stan’ flat-footed an’ let dat ar hoss bite de top er my head off, you done gone an’ fooled yo’s’e’f. I know’d what he wuz gwine ter do, time I seed de white er his eye. His breff hot nuff ter burn yo’ han’. What he want ter come doin’ dat a way fer? I don’t want no hoss ter be huggin’ me wid his upper lip nohow. I’ll tell anybody dat.”

While Drusilla was quarreling, Timoleon was

grazing near by, and Aaron and the children were still laughing.

“Ef you-all think it so funny, go dar whar dat hoss is, an’ let ’im nibble at you an’ blow his nose on you a time er two.”

“What does she say, Son of Ben Ali?” Timoleon asked, raising his head from the rank Bermuda grass.

“She says she thought you were about to bite off her head.”

Timoleon gave a snort of contempt, and addressed himself again to the dainty feast before him.

“Not too much of that, Grandson of Abdallah,” said Aaron. “You are too fat now. You need exercise. How long since you have had a gallop?”

“A month of Sundays, Son of Ben Ali.”

“To-day you shall have one. On your head I will place a halter, on your broad back I will strap your blanket. On the blanket I will place my friends and yours, the grandchildren of the White-haired Master. But listen! a stumble, and I’m done with you; any trickery, and the Son of Ben Ali will come near you no more.”

"So may it be, Son of Ben Ali."

"I believe you, Grandson of Abdallah. You are to go by yonder gate through the lane to the great road. From there it is a mile and a half to the gate that opens on the avenue, leading to the house of the White-haired Master. At that gate I shall await you. Then up the avenue to the house you are to go, and three times around the boxwood circle where the avenue ends."

"So it shall be, Son of Ben Ali. Have you not carried a noggin of water on my back and set me at a gallop without spilling a drop? So it shall be now, Son of Ben Ali."

Aaron went into the stable and came forth with a halter. This he threw on Timoleon's head, passing the loose end over the horse's neck and tying it in the ring, thus forming reins for the rider to handle. Then he folded a heavy blanket four times, placed it on the horse's back, and strapped it down with a surcingle.

"Not too tight — not too tight, Son of Ben Ali," said Timoleon, backing his ears a little.

"Now, then, for a ride," said Aaron, turning to the children.

"Oh, I'm afraid!" cried Sweetest Susan.
"Mamma would be angry."

"Try him here, in the lot," suggested Aaron to Buster John.

Now Buster John was a pretty good rider for a youngster, and was somewhat proud of the fact. He had even helped to break a young mule to the saddle. So, after a little persuasion, he allowed Aaron to lift him to Timoleon's back.

"Easy, now," said Aaron.

The black stallion stepped proudly off. From a swinging walk he broke into an easy canter, which soon became a swinging gallop. Before he had gone around the field, Buster John had lost all fear, and from his gently undulating seat waved his hand gayly to Sweetest Susan.

"Oh, I wish I could go, too!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands.

"Why not, little Missy?" said Aaron. "I have seen you riding the Gray Pony without a saddle."

"But he is as gentle as a dog," explained Sweetest Susan.

"Why, so is Timoleon," replied Aaron. "Try him. I will run beside him to catch you, if you fall. I'll not run far before you will say, 'Go back!'"



A RIDE ON THE BLACK STALLION

By this time Timoleon came sweeping up to where they stood, and stopped. Buster John's face fairly glowed with the delight he felt.

"Well," said Sweetest Susan, unable to resist the temptation. "Well, I'll go, but if I fall" —

Before she could finish what she had to say, the strong arms of Aaron had lifted her to a seat behind Buster John.

"How can you fall?" asked that bold youngster. "Hold fast to me. Put your arms around me, and when you fall, let me know."

"You didn't talk that way just now," said Sweetest Susan. To this Buster John made no reply. Aaron stood beside the black stallion and stroked his neck.

"Grandson of Abdallah, show me what you are this day. Once around the field, and then to the lane gate."

The horse took three long strides forward, and then broke into a canter as before. Aaron ran beside Timoleon a little way, one hand on Sweetest Susan's elbow to give her confidence, but he soon saw that she had lost all fear, and so, still running, he went to the gate that opened in the lane and threw it back, and stood there.

The black stallion, going in a steady gallop, swept around the field, and then came toward the gate. The children were laughing.

“Don’t forget, Grandson of Abdallah! You know my hand!” This was Aaron’s last warning, as Timoleon went through the gate. The Son of Ben Ali watched horse and riders for a few moments. Then he closed the gate and ran swiftly through the lot, going toward the head of the avenue that led to the big house. The lane, half a mile in length, led obliquely away from the house and from the avenue until it joined the public road. From that point, turning squarely to the left, the distance to the avenue gate was about a mile. From the stable to the avenue gate, through the spring lot—the way Aaron went—was not quite half a mile.

“If I go too fast, grandson of the White-haired Master,” said Timoleon, as they turned into the public road, “touch me on the shoulder. And don’t be frightened when I lift my head and tell the fools I am coming.”

As they came in sight of the negro quarters, Timoleon raised his head high in the air and neighed shrilly three times in quick succession.

It sounded like a challenge to man and beast. That plantation had heard it many times before, and it had usually been the forerunner of some display of savagery on the part of the black stallion — sometimes a negro run down and trampled, sometimes a mule or a cow crippled; but always something. The sound of it was heard with dismay, except by Aaron.

It was no wonder, therefore, that the negroes came out of their cabins with alarm painted on their faces. It was no wonder they stood transfixed when they saw the horse flying along the road, his thick mane whipping the wind, with the two children on his back. They had no time to admire the strength and symmetry of the horse, and yet he presented a beautiful sight — his glossy neck arched, his long mane enveloping the children as in a cloud, the undulations of his magnificent form and his swift movements the perfection of grace.

Once more, as he thundered across the bridge that spanned the stream leading from the spring, the black stallion screamed forth his note of defiance. A man, coming along the road, went over the fence as nimbly as a squirrel. Cows

grazing in the fields, near the roadside, hoisted their tails in the air and ran off to the woods. The mules in the horse lot ran around aimlessly, and then huddled themselves together in a corner. The Gray Pony went scampering through the peach orchard, hunting a place of safety.

Then the cry went up from the negro quarters, "Timoleon's loose! Timoleon's loose!" The cry was echoed at the big house. The children's father laid down the book he was reading, and went out upon the veranda, followed quickly by his wife. The grandfather rose from his easy chair and joined them. They heard the tremendous clatter of hoofs on the hard road and the screaming stallion. They saw Aaron running up the avenue, followed by Drusilla. Calamity seemed to have swooped down upon the plantation. A negro woman, bolder than the rest, had managed to run to the big house. She rushed through it, without regard for ceremony.

"Mistiss, dem blessed chillun" —

She wanted to say were riding the runaway stallion, but she sank to the floor, speechless.

"Oh, my children! my children! Where are my precious children?" cried the mother.

At that moment Aaron reached the avenue gate, opened it wide, and the black stallion cantered through it, and came galloping down the drive.

"I see the children," said the white-haired grandfather. "They are safe. They have been giving Timoleon his exercise. See! they are laughing and waving their hands!"

The mother looked, but the sight seemed to terrify her so that she covered her face with her hands. Only for a moment, however. She looked again, thinking they were wringing their hands and crying for help. But, no! they were really laughing. In front of the yard gate there was an ornamental circle, filled with neatly trimmed box-wood, privet and acacia bushes. Coming to this circle Timoleon turned to the right and galloped around it, the children waving their hands to their mother, father and grandfather. With his waving mane and flowing tail, his arched and shining neck, and his graceful movements, the horse presented a spectacle long to be remembered.

"Why, they are riding him with a halter!" cried the father, taking fresh alarm.

"How many times have I told you he is the gentlest horse I ever knew?" sighed the grandfather. "Ah, what a magnificent creature he is! What a pity he is penned on this plantation!"

Three times around the circle Timoleon galloped, and then wheeled toward the gate that led to the stable lot. The children waved a mock farewell to the still astonished spectators, who, standing on the veranda, heard Timoleon go clattering to the rear of the house.

The mother recovering from her fright, which was serious, became very angry, and this was not serious at all.

"That is Aaron's work," she cried, "and the children shall never go about him any more."

"Aaron will thank you, if you'll stick to your word," said the grandfather. "I bought Aaron fifteen years ago, and I have never had occasion to undo anything he has ever done. I owe him a debt of gratitude that I could never repay if I were to live a thousand years."

"I know, father — I know," replied the children's mother, more gently. "But he gave me a terrible fright just now."

Timoleon galloped to his stable, and stood

there waiting for Aaron. Sweetest Susan, holding to Buster John's hand, slid to the ground, and then Buster John followed suit.

"You might take the halter off, little one," said Timoleon, and he held his head so that the youngster could unbuckle the strap. Then the horse began to graze as contentedly as any farm animal. Presently Aaron came with a bucket of cool water from the spring. Timoleon buried his nose in it, drank his fill, and then washed his mouth by sucking up the water and letting it run out over his tongue and teeth. Then the blanket was removed and the Grandson of Abdallah stretched himself on the warm grass and had a good wallow. After that Aaron rubbed him off thoroughly, gave him a bait of oats, and, while he ate, went over his silky coat with a currycomb and brush, whistling all the while in a peculiar way.

III.

GRISTLE, THE GRAY PONY, BEGINS HIS STORY.

THE ride on Timoleon, which was an exciting one from start to finish, was enough fun for the children for one day. They sought no other amusement. When they had seen Aaron feed and groom the horse, they went to the big house, where they knew the ride had created a sensation. There, in answer to numberless questions asked by their mother, they told a part of the story of their ride. They said nothing about hearing Timoleon talk, for they knew that not even their grandfather would believe that part of the story. But they told all about the ride, how swiftly and easily the horse went, and how gentle he was. Buster John was, of course, quite a hero, and Sweetest Susan shared all the honors with him.

The children's mother had more than half a notion to read them a lecture; but the white-haired grandfather protested against this. He

said the youngsters were perfectly safe in Aaron's care. He declared he didn't want to see boys play the part of girls, nor girls act like dolls. Then he began to talk about Little Crotchet, who had been so fond of Aaron. It was curious to the children to hear the white-haired grandfather talk of their uncle (whom they had never seen) as though he were a little boy.

"It seems but yesterday," said the old gentleman, with a gentle sigh that ended in a smile, "that Little Crotchet was hobbling through the house on his crutches, or scampering about the neighborhood on the Gray Pony. But the Gray Pony is grazing out there in the orchard, and Little Crotchet has been dead these fifteen years. If he were alive now, he would be twenty-nine years old."

The old gentleman fell to musing, and sat silent for a little while. Then he went on, as if talking to himself:—

"And I am seventy-three, and Aaron is forty, and, let me see, the pony is eighteen, and Timoleon seventeen. All getting old."

"Uncle Crotchet was n't always crippled, was he, grandfather?" asked Sweetest Susan.

"Oh, no," replied the old gentleman. "Until he was seven years old he was as healthy a child as I ever saw. Then he was suddenly taken ill, and lay in his bed for months. After that he was never able to walk without crutches. Twenty-nine years old! Why, he'd be a man grown. As it is, he is still a little boy. I remember," the grandfather continued, becoming reminiscent, "when he wanted me to buy Aaron. From the very first the two had a fancy for each other. Aaron came from Virginia in a speculator's caravan. He became so unmanageable that he had to be sold. Little Crotchet begged me to buy him, but I stood joking with the little fellow, and before I knew it our neighbor across the creek had bought him."

"Old Mr. Gossett?" inquired Buster John.

"Yes," replied the grandfather. "Mr. Gossett bought Aaron. Little Crotchet was so distressed about it that I offered Mr. Gossett half as much more for Aaron than he had given. But he refused it. Then I offered him twice as much, and he refused that, and I did n't feel able to give any more."

"Why would n't Mr. Gossett sell Aaron?"

asked Buster John. "I've heard he's very fond of money."

"He's a queer man," responded the grandfather, "hard in some things and clever enough in others. He had heard the speculator say that Aaron was a very dangerous character, and so Mr. Gossett declared that he was going to tame him. Gossett was a much younger man then than he is now, and about as reckless as any one in the county. I remember he said something in a light way that made Little Crotchet angry, and the lad spurred the Gray Pony at him and would have rode him down but for me."

"Was he riding the Gray Pony, grandfather?" asked Buster John.

"Yes," replied the old gentleman with a sigh: "yes, the Gray Pony. It was fifteen years ago, but it seems but yesterday."

The grandfather was silent after that, and the children said no more. They went to bed when bedtime came, but not before Buster John had made up his mind to rise bright and early the next morning and call on the Gray Pony. He told Sweetest Susan and Drusilla of his plan, and they said they were anxious to go, too. So it

was arranged that the housemaid should wake them when she came in from the quarters.

This was done, and to the surprise of everybody whose business it was to be up early, the children sallied forth a little after sunrise. They went into the orchard, hunting for the Gray Pony. Before they had gone far, a rabbit jumped up right at their feet, ran off a little distance, and then sat up and looked at them.

"He's very much like Mr. Rabbit," said Sweetest Susan.

"He's lots better lookin'," remarked Drusilla, who had never forgiven Mr. Rabbit for mistaking her for the Tar Baby.

While they were standing there looking at the rabbit, Sweetest Susan lifted her hands suddenly and uttered an exclamation that startled Buster John and Drusilla, and sent the rabbit scurrying off through the sedge.

"What is the matter?" asked Buster John.

"Oh, to-day is Sunday!" cried Sweetest Susan.

"Why, of course it is Sunday," said Buster John. "What of it? Is it any harm to walk through an old peach orchard hunting for a pony?"



A RABBIT JUMPED UP AT THEIR FEET

"No-o-o," replied Sweetest Susan, hesitatingly.

"What is the matter, then?"

"Nothing. I had forgotten it was Sunday, and just happened to think about it," Sweetest Susan replied demurely.

Going forward and looking about the orchard, the children soon saw the Gray Pony grazing in a fence corner at the further side. As they went toward him, the Gray Pony saw them and began to move away, backing his ears and showing signs of irritation.

"Leave me alone," said the Pony. "I don't want to run through these briars and scratch myself. Go away. I don't want to see you."

"Wait," cried Buster John; "I want to talk to you."

"Shucks and smutty nubbins!" exclaimed the Pony. "You can hardly talk to yourselves. I don't want you about me. All you can do is to throw rocks and poke sticks at me through the fence. Go away. I might accidentally hurt you. I wouldn't be sorry if I did, but they'd send me off to the river place, and I don't want to go there and get curkle burrs in my mane and tail."

"But I can talk to you," persisted Buster John. "I can understand everything you say."

The Gray Pony tossed his head contemptuously. "Go off — go off. Yonder comes Aaron. The Son of Ben Ali will make you let me alone."

Sure enough, Aaron was coming along the orchard path with a bucket of bran. Presently he called the Gray Pony. "Come, Gristle, come."

The Pony kicked up his heels, shook his head, and went galloping toward Aaron as hard as he could go. When the children came up to where the Pony was eating his bran, they found him disputing with Aaron. If the children did n't know how to talk to him day before yesterday, how could they talk now? That's what he'd like to know.

"Gristle, listen! If you did n't have this bran-mash an hour ago, how can you be sticking your nose in it now? That's what I'd like to know."

The Pony snorted so hard that he blew the wet bran all around. "How did they learn to talk to us?" he asked.

"They have been touched," replied Aaron.

"Well," said the Gray Pony, "that changes things. That alters the case. I'm sorry I abused them. But that boy there has n't been very good to me. I've seen no boy like Little Crotchet. I saw them riding the black stallion yesterday. How was that?"

"Have n't I told you, Gristle? They have been touched. They have the sign."

"I see," responded the Gray Pony. "That changes things. That alters the case. But what do they want with me?"

"They can answer for themselves, Gristle. They are here."

"Why, we wanted you to tell us about the time when my Uncle Crotchet asked grandfather to buy Uncle Aaron."

The Pony drew away from the bucket of wet bran and looked at the children. Then he looked at Aaron. "Well!" he snorted, "how did they know?"

Aaron laughed and pointed toward the big house. "They heard it there, from the White-haired Master. They are our friends, Gristle. They know the sign."

"That alters the case," said the Gray Pony for

the third time, "but the story is a long one. To-day is the day when you get in the carriage and go where the talking-man lives. I used to carry the Little Master there, one day in every week, from the time he could ride."

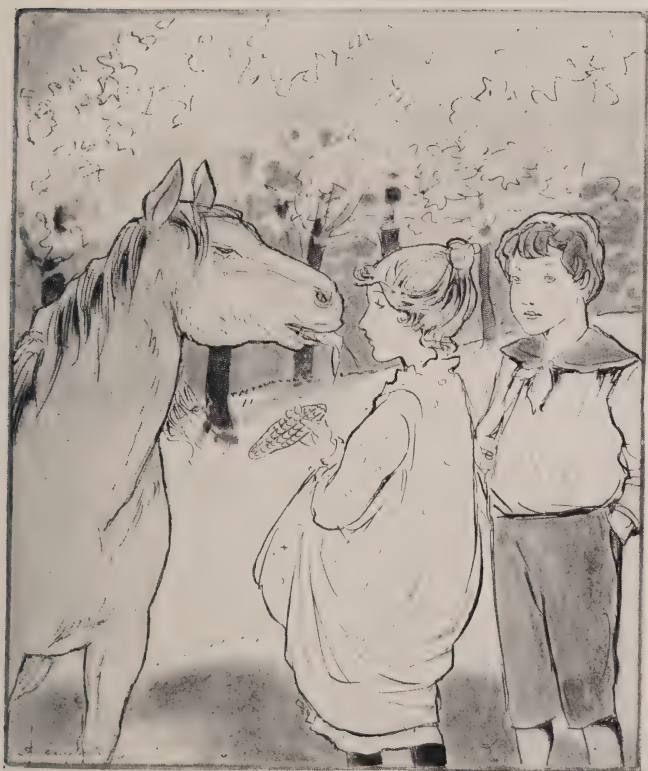
"He means to preaching," explained Aaron, and the explanation made the children laugh.

"Come to-morrow," said the Gray Pony; "then everybody will be at work, and we shall have no one to bother us."

Aaron thought that this was a good idea, and at his suggestion, the children agreed to it, though not with a very good grace. To-morrow seemed to be so far off.

But time rolled away on the plantation as it did elsewhere, and some time during the night, when the children were fast asleep, and snoring, maybe, to-morrow became to-day. After breakfast, when they had gone over their lessons with their grandfather, who taught them, to amuse himself, they went out and found the Gray Pony, carrying him some green corn.

"Now, I like that," said the Pony switching his tail vigorously. "I've had a bad taste in my mouth all day, and this green corn will drive



THEY CARRIED HIM SOME GREEN CORN



it away." He munched at it a little while, looking at the children occasionally, and then began :

"I was very fond of the Little Master from the first. The White-haired Master found me in a drove of mules and horses in a pen in town. We had traveled hundreds of miles, and though I was young and tough, I was very stiff and tired. But the drover cracked his whip, separated me from the rest, and ran me into a corner of the pen, where I stood trembling, because I did n't know what moment the lash would crack on my back, as it had cracked many times before. The White-haired Master — his hair was as gray as mine even then — held the Little Master in his arms, and when they came near I stood still and allowed the little fellow to pat my back and stroke my neck. The Little Master cried : ' Father buy him ! I like him ! '

"That was enough. A negro came and put a halter on me, and led me from the pen. Soon some one brought a bridle, and then a small saddle. After awhile the Little Master was placed on my back, and some one handed him two heavy sticks. I was alarmed at first, fearing I was to be beaten with them, but when I

flinched the Little Master stroked my neck, and I had no more fear. The sticks he carried along to help him over the ground when he was not riding, and he used them nimbly.

“So we came home, and grew to know each other. In cold weather I had a warm stable to rest in, and a heavy blanket to sleep under. In pleasant weather I had cool water twice a day, and young corn and green barley. People used to say he rode me too hard at times, but it was not so. It was a pleasure to him and no harm to me.

“One day there came to him from far away a teacher — a young man with brown hair and blue eyes — and for a time the Little Master was troubled. He had no desire to sit in the house for hours and do nothing but read in the books. I used to watch for him through the fence, and he was very proud indeed when he found that I knew his voice from the rest and would follow him about without bridle or halter. I missed him when the teacher came, and I used to go to the fence and call him.

“But I missed him only a day or two. The teacher was a wise young man, and he soon saw

that if the Little Master was to be taught at all, the teaching must go on in the open air, with no more books to bother with than he could carry in one hand. So it came to pass that every day the little master would call for me, and then we would go on long journeys through the woods and fields, the teacher walking with me.

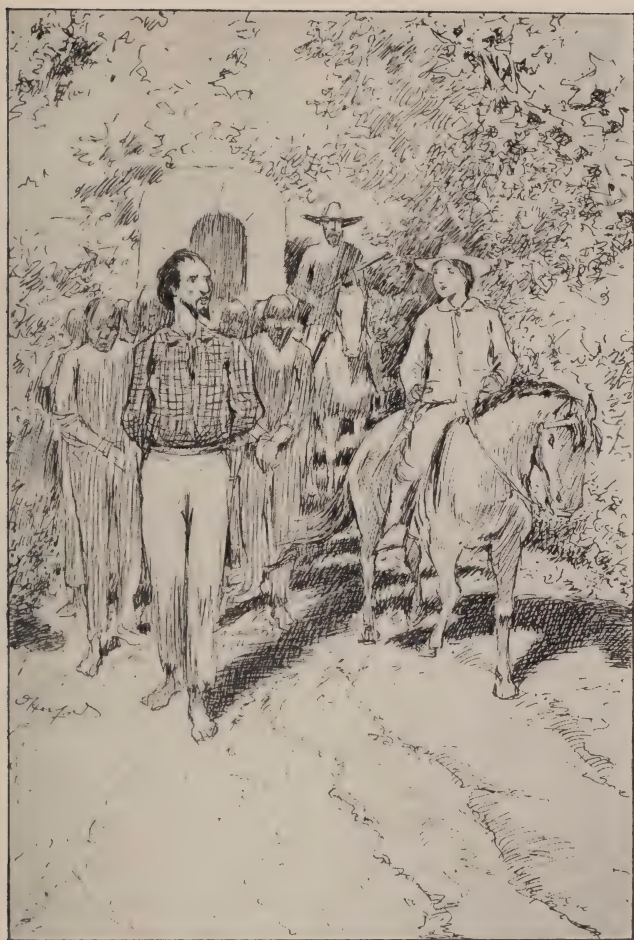
“Sometimes the teacher would carry books in his hand, but he carried more in his head. He was wise. He knew the poisonous plants and vines almost as well as I did, and I used to wonder how he found them out, not having to eat them. This went on whenever the weather was pleasant, and I heard the teacher from far away say to the little master that he was learning a great deal more of the things that were in the books, than if he were shut up in a tight room with the books themselves. If I could have remembered all I heard, I’d be pretty well educated myself.

“One morning I was fed early. I heard the negroes say that the White-haired Master, the Little Master, and the teacher were going to town. It was court week, they said. The judge and jury were going to sit and punish men for being

meaner than the animals. I thought it was very funny. But I ate my breakfast with a better appetite, because I knew none of my kith and kin were to be hauled up before the judge and jury for cheating and swindling, and drinking and gambling.

“So we went to town, the Little Master and I. The White-haired Master and the teacher rode in the buggy. We kept with them a little way, but the weather was fine and the roads were good, and after a while the Little Master gave me the rein, which I had been asking for ever so long, and I cantered forward, leaving the buggy far behind and out of sight.

“I cantered on in this way, up hill and down hill — for it was as easy as walking — until we came nearly to the town. Then suddenly the Little Master reached forward and touched me on the shoulder. It was the way he had of warning me. We were coming to a point where another road led into ours, and it was well the Little Master warned me when he did. Else, when I saw what I did, I should have given a start that would have unseated him ; for right before me, coming slowly our road, was a train of huge wagons,



THE SLAVE TRAIN

covered with white cloth. There were five wagons, each pulled by two mules. In front of the foremost wagon a file of negroes was marching, two by two. There must have been forty odd in all. At first I thought they were pulling the wagon, for there was a stout rope reaching from the end of the wagon tongue to the foremost negro of the file, and the end was fastened to his waist. On each side of this rope the other negroes walked, and I soon saw that every one was handcuffed to the rope.

"The sight of all this," said the gray pony, continuing his story, "surprised me so that I stopped in the road, and came near tucking tail and running back the way I came. But the Little Master was never afraid of anything. He stroked my shoulder and scolded me, too, and urged me forward. Now there was nothing about this wagon train to frighten me. I had seen wagon trains before. But this one loomed up so suddenly and unexpectedly that it made me have a queer, shivery feeling, as when I hear a horse-fly zooming around and don't know where he is going to light. It happened that the wagons were on a sandy level, and neither

their wheels nor the mules' feet made any noise. The negroes were marching along as silently as the shadows that run on the ground when the moon is shining and the clouds are flying. It was the first time I had ever seen negroes going along the road together in utter silence. They were neither talking nor laughing, and they seemed to be very far from singing.

"Going nearer, I saw that the negro drivers were chained to the wagons. On each side of the file of marching negroes rode a white man, a shotgun lying across his lap. I thought the negroes were prisoners, and that the men were carrying them to court for the judge and jury to sit on them. So the Little Master thought, for he urged me forward until we came up with the man who rode near the tall negro at the head of the file.

"'Good-morning,' said the Little Master to the man.

"'Good-day, sonny,' replied the man, but he kept his eye on the negro at the head of the file.

"'Whose negroes are these?' the Little Master asked.

"'Mine,' said the man, smacking his lips over it; 'every one mine.'

“Then we went on in silence. The Little Master had a way, when he was puzzled, of reaching over the saddle and twisting a wisp of mane between his fingers. He did this now. He curled the wisp of hair on his forefinger and uncurled it ever so many times, as we went on in silence. I noticed that the negro at the head of the file had his arms tied at the elbows. The whole weight of the long rope, which was a big one, fell on this negro, but he was tall and strong and moved forward without sign of distress.

“Presently the Little Master spoke to the man again. ‘What have your negroes done that they should be carried to jail?’

“The man laughed loudly, as he replied: ‘I’m not carrying them to jail. They are for sale.’

“‘Then you are a negro speculator,’ said the Little Master.

“‘That’s what some people call me, sonny; speculator or what not, I have negroes for sale. If you want to buy one, I’ll sell you that buck at the head of the gang. He’s the finest of the lot, but I’ll sell him cheap. He’s worse than a tiger.’

“The Little Master urged me forward until

we came to the side of the man at the head of the file. That was my first sight of the Son of Ben Ali. I knew at once that he was no negro. The Little Master spoke to him, and he smiled as he answered.

“‘I’ll sell him cheap, sonny,’ said the man; ‘name your own price, give me the money, and take him.’

“The Little Master slapped the pommel of his saddle, and I knew by that he was angry. But what he intended to say was never said, for just then the White-haired Master and the teacher came by in the buggy, going at a sweeping trot, and the Little Master gave me the rein to follow, which I was more than glad to do. Never before had I seen the White-haired Master use the whip on old Sorrel, the buggy horse, but he used it that day, and I had hard work to catch up and keep up. The teacher had turned in his seat and watched the file of negroes and the covered wagons as far as he could see them. There was a frown on his face, and his eyes had a queer light in them. I always dodge when a man looks at me that way.

“I think the White-haired Master wanted to get the teacher away from that procession of negroes. I heard them talking as I cantered behind the buggy.

“‘You are from the North, and, of course, you don’t understand these things,’ said the White-haired Master.

“‘You are right,’ replied the teacher. ‘I don’t understand them at all. I’m truly sorry I saw that sight. I shall see it again in my dreams.’

“‘I have been living here fifty years,’ the White-haired Master remarked, ‘and that is the second time I ever saw it.’

“The teacher said nothing more, and we soon entered the town, where there was a great many people. Hitched to one of the racks I saw a roan mule that had given me a vicious bite when we were in the drove together. He was poor enough now, and his ears hung dejectedly. I wanted to stop and read him a moral, but the Little Master bade me go on, and I had no opportunity to speak to my old tormentor.”

IV.

GRISTLE, THE GRAY PONY, CONCLUDES HIS STORY.

THE Little Master gave me a drink of cool water from the well in the public square, and then he had me carried to a comfortable stall in the stable behind the old tavern. I don't know how long I stayed there, but by the time I had dropped off into a comfortable doze, dreaming that I was nibbling sassafras buds in the orchard at home, a negro came running into the stable and into my stall. He came upon me so sudden that I turned in the stall to get out of his way, and nearly mashed the breath out of him. He limped along and led me to the front of the tavern. There I saw the Little Master waiting to mount, and I went toward him gladly enough.

"I thought we were to go home, but my thoughts jumped ahead of facts. I soon saw that the speculator's wagons and his file of

negroes had come into town, and had stopped to rest on the public square, where a great crowd had gathered around them — some out of curiosity and some out of sympathy. I heard an old horse, blind in one eye, say to a companion tied near that such sights were seldom seen in these parts. The Little Master had sent for me, so that, by sitting on my back, he would be as tall as any of the men.

“He rode me into the crowd that had gathered around the negroes. The people made way for him, and I soon found myself so close to the Son of Ben Ali that he could touch my nose with his hand, although his elbows were pinioned. So that he was able to give me the sign, and I knew him and spoke to him and he to me ; whereupon he knew that he had found one friend there. He had found two friends, for the Little Master stretched forth his hands, white as a flower, and touched the Son of Ben Ali on the cheek, where there was the mark of a wound, saying, ‘ Poor fellow ! I am sorry for you.’ And the Son of Ben Ali reached up the best he could, his arms being pinioned, and took the white hand of the Little Master in his, and pressed it to his forehead and

then to his lips. After that he held his head higher, so that he looked over all that stood around him and beyond him, and smiled a little.

“But just then the man who owned him came hustling toward us, untied the rope to which the Son of Ben Ali was chained and pushed him roughly through the crowd to the sheriff’s block that stood near the court house door. This he made the Son of Ben Ali mount, so that all might see him. As he stood there, without a coat, the collar of his shirt thrown open, and the muscles of his chest swelling and falling, he seemed to be a man among men. When the white man stood on the block beside him, the crown of his hat was no higher than the Son of Ben Ali’s shoulder.

“The man made a speech to the people. I don’t remember everything he said, but I could see he hated the Son of Ben Ali, and was afraid of him. He was ready to jump from the block and run. But the Son of Ben Ali paid no attention to him. He had his eyes fixed on the face of the Little Master, following every movement he made, and always smiling. The Little Master kept his eyes on the White-haired Master,



BEN ALI HAD FOUND TWO FRIENDS

and called and beckoned to him. But somehow — I could n't see what the trouble was — the White-haired Master appeared to be very busy. He was talking with a man who was a stranger to me, and, although he heard the Little Master, and nodded and smiled at him, he kept on talking. I went toward him without any urging, and when we got there he was talking about constitutions and other government contraptions, and seemed to be very warm over it. I was so disgusted that I snorted as often and as loud as I could, and if people had only known it, there was more horse sense in one of my snorts than there was in all the politics I have heard from that day to this.

“But all this time the speculator, or trader, or whatever you call him, was calling to the crowd to come and see the fine bargain he was going to offer. I had one ear for the trader and another for the Little Master. One said : —

“‘Come up, gentlemen, and see what a sacrifice I am going to make. Come up, and I'll tell you why.’

“The other said : ‘Come, father, please come ! You'll be too late !’ The White-haired Master

nodded and smiled. 'Presently, son; presently.'

"The trader said: 'Walk right up, gentlemen, and I'll tell you the truth. I'm selling this boy because he's too tricky to travel with. He's bad tempered and hard headed. What he needs is a master who will take time to make him buckle down to work.'

"The Little Master said: 'Father, come. Oh, don't wait any longer.' The White-haired Master smiled. 'Yes, yes!' and placed his hand on my neck, whereupon I snorted and shook it off.

"The trader cried out at the top of his voice: 'Come up, gentlemen! Come up! Look at this boy's limbs. Look at his muscles. Not a flaw about him, except his temper. What am I offered, cash down, for this likely fellow?'

"The Little Master said: 'Please, please hurry, father! You'll be too late. The man is selling him now!' The air was blue with state rights and constitutions. I shook my head and gave a loud whicker. This seemed to irritate the White-haired Master, for he ceased to smile and joke.

"'Go buy him yourself,' he said, sharply.

"'How much shall I bid, father?'

“ ‘Up to twelve hundred dollars.’

“ Before the Little Master could take the bridle reins in his hand, I wheeled and cantered toward the crowd that had gathered around the sheriff’s block, where the Son of Ben Ali stood.

“ The trader was saying: ‘How much am I offered? How much? Look at him, gentlemen! As sound as a dollar!’

“ The man who lives across the creek — Mr. Goshawk — no — Mr. Gossett — got on the block with the Son of Ben Ali and put on his spectacles and looked at him, and felt of him, and thumped him on the back, and punched him in the sides. The Son of Ben Ali never flinched nor moved a muscle. He kept his eyes fixed on the Little Master. But, after all, what could the Little Master do? He was but a child.

“ Mr. Gossett came down from the block, took off his spectacles, and said something to the trader, who then cried out: —

“ ‘What do you think, good people? I am asked to give this boy away! My friend here offers me five hundred dollars for the finest hand that ever stood on the block in this country. Five hundred dollars! I am offered five hundred dollars!’

“‘Seven hundred dollars!’ cried the Little Master.

“The trader stopped and looked at the Little Master, as if he thought the bid was a joke.

“‘Who said seven hundred?’ he asked.

“‘I did,’ cried the Little Master.

“‘Seven hundred it is,’ said the trader. ‘I am offered seven hundred — only seven hundred!’

“Mr. Gossett said something to the trader, who cried out: ‘Eight hundred! I am offered eight hundred!’

“‘Nine hundred!’ said the Little Master.

“‘That is right!’ cried the trader. ‘In this country even the children have saddle-bags full of money. Nine hundred! I am offered nine hundred!’

“Mr. Gossett nodded his head. I was watching him.

“‘One thousand!’ cried the trader. ‘I am offered one thousand! Am I to give this man away for one thousand dollars?’

“‘Twelve hundred,’ said the Little Master in a voice as clear as a bell.

“This seemed to stagger the trader. He

looked at the Little Master, and then he looked at the crowd. He shook his head, and then some of the people laughed. This made others laugh, and then the trader, very red in the face, turned to Mr. Gossett and said : —

“ ‘ I don’t like to be made a fool of. This negro is yours, sir, for one thousand dollars.’ ”

“ This made the people laugh again, but the Little Master did n’t laugh. He cried to the crowd around. ‘ Get out of the way here ! ’ and gave me the word to push my way through. I needed neither whip nor spur for that, and the people in front of me had as much as they could do to scuffle and scramble out of my way.

“ ‘ Here, sir, what does this mean ? ’ cried the Little Master. ‘ I bid twelve hundred dollars, and you sell him for one thousand dollars. What do you mean ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Don’t bother me, sonny,’ the man replied. ‘ The negro is mine. I sell him for what I please. This gentleman here,’ he pointed to Mr. Gossett, ‘ said you were playing one of your pranks. I’ve no time for pranks. If you are not pranking, plank down your twelve hundred dollars on that block there.’ ”

“Mr. Gossett had taken from his pocket a long red book, and was already counting out the money he had bid. Then and there a thing happened that has never been understood by anybody but me. Everybody will tell you that the Little Master tried to ride over and run down Mr. Gossett, but it is not so. The Little Master had no more to do with it than the old buggy horse who was tied to the rack near by. I felt the Little Master’s hand shake as it rested on my shoulder, and I heard him sob. I was so mad that everything grew dark except Mr. Gossett’s face. I plunged at him and tried to get his head in my mouth, but he saw me coming and fell backward and rolled out of the way before I could reach him, nor could I trample him. His luck saved him.

“And then somebody caught my bridle and gave it a jerk that brought me to my senses. Whoever it was led me out of the crowd and away from the court house. I could feel the Little Master shaking in the saddle, and I knew he was crying, but I held my head down, not knowing what to do or where to go.

“Presently the White-haired Master, hearing

of the commotion, came running toward us. His face was as white as a sheet.

“‘Why, my son! my darling boy! What is the trouble?’ He placed his arms around the Little Master. ‘Oh, tell your father! Has any one dared to hurt so much as your little finger? There, don’t cry any more.’

“Then the Little Master told him what you have already heard, his voice shaking and his white hands trembling.

“‘Wait!’ said the White-haired Master.

“With that he suddenly turned and went toward the crowd at the court house. I followed, though the Little Master never touched a rein. The people seemed to expect something, and they made way for the White-haired Master, and for me, with my nose at his coat-tails.

“‘Has the sale been closed?’ he asked sharply. His words snapped out like the popping of a whip.

“‘Yes, sir; yes, sir — it has been closed,’ the trader replied. He was as humble and polite as one of his poor negroes.

“‘Gossett!’ said the White-haired Master — his voice sounded as I have heard it when he was talking to a lazy plough hand — ‘Gossett! I will

give you fifteen hundred dollars for your bargain.'

"Mr. Gossett shook his head and smiled, showing two or three yellow teeth. I was so anxious to get at him that the Little Master was compelled to slap me with the slack of the bridle reins and bid me stand still.

"'No,' said Mr. Gossett, 'I'd rather have the nigger than the money.'

"'I'll give you two thousand dollars,' persisted the White-haired Master.

"Mr. Gossett showed his yellow teeth again. 'Well, sir,' he said, 'if he's worth that to you, he's worth it to me. The fact is, I want to tame the nigger. They say he's as wild as a buck, and as hard-headed as a mule. I want to tame him.'

"The White-haired Master turned to the trader. 'Why did you insult my son and me by refusing to cry his last bid?' He caught the man by the throat and shook him. The people gave back and scattered a little at this, for in those times men were quick to use their knives and pistols. But the trader had no idea of using his, though he had both in his belt.

"'Let me explain, sir; let me explain,' he cried,

as the White-haired Master released his hold. 'That gentleman there said the youngster was only playing me one of his jokes.'

" 'What gentleman?' the White-haired Master asked, as quick as a flash. He wheeled and looked around, as if searching for some one. The people were still afraid a fight was about to take place, and they stood off some distance, but not so far that they could n't hear every word that was said.

" 'What gentleman?' the White-haired Master repeated, facing the trader.

"The trader went to Mr. Gossett and touched his shoulder so as to make no mistake. 'This is the gentleman, sir,' he said.

"At this the White-haired Master fairly roared with laughter. 'Pay him another hundred, Gossett — pay him another hundred! He has earned it. You'll not find another man in the county to pay you such a compliment.'

"There must have been some joke or hit in this, for the people laughed even louder than the White-haired Master, and Mr. Gossett turned very red in the face. But if it was a joke it passed over my head. I saw no fun in it, and neither

did the Son of Ben Ali, who had drawn near and was fondling the thin white hand of the Little Master in his."

Here the Gray Pony paused and held his head up as if he heard a noise somewhere. Then he cropped off a bunch of peach leaves and chewed on them, to all appearances relishing their flavor. This done, he scratched his neck by rubbing it against the peach-tree, which was old and rough. The children sat absorbed in the story he was telling.

"Now, right here," the Gray Pony went on, "two or three things happened so close together that the quickest eye could hardly separate them. If I told them as they happened I should have to tell them all at once, but this can't be done, not even in your tongue. So I'll have to blunder along the best I know how. In cantering or galloping I always start off on my right forefoot. A man taught me that with a whip, and I've never been able to forget it. That foot comes down heaviest, and I always fling the right foreshoe first. It was loose when we started from home that morning, and when I jumped at Mr. Gossett I wrenched it nearly off. For a time I did n't

mind it, but every time I stamped my foot to drive the flies away it rang and rattled like a cow bell. The Son of Ben Ali, hearing it rattle as he stood by the Little Master, stooped and placed his hand on my knee. I gave him my foot, and he drew the shoe off by giving it a slight twist with his fingers.

“When the White-haired Master told Mr. Gossett to pay the trader another hundred dollars he made a step toward the man to see what he would do. At that moment Mr. Gossett’s son George, a great rowdy and bully, came rushing through the crowd. He was red in the face and fairly foaming at the mouth. He came crying, ‘Is pap in a fuss? Where are you, pap?’ He had a pistol in his hand, and when he saw the White-haired Master standing so near his pap, as he called him, he bellowed like a mad bull, and came rushing up, leveling the pistol as he got near.

“This happened just as the Son of Ben Ali wrenched the shoe from my foot. Still stooping he turned his head and saw George Gossett halt and point his pistol at the White-haired Master. I felt the body of the Son of Ben Ali sway under my neck in the most unaccountable manner, and

the next moment I saw young Gossett fall as if he had been struck by lightning. The Son of Ben Ali crept under my belly, and when I saw him again he was sitting on the block where he had stood to be sold, his arms folded, and his eyes closed as if he were fast asleep.

“No one knew what had happened except the Son of Ben Ali and myself. All eyes had been fixed on George Gossett and the White-haired Master. Some said Gossett had fallen in a fit of passion and that the blood had burst from his face. Some said that he had fallen on a horse-shoe that happened to be lying near. Some said one thing and some another. George Gossett always declared, so I’ve heard, that somebody jabbed him in the face with a forked stick, but his best friends said he was drunk at the time and fell on the horseshoe and hurt himself. But there were some people who whispered it around that they saw the blood gush from his face as he fell forward.

“The matter was never explained, and for many a long day no one but the Son of Ben Ali and I knew that Gossett had been hit in the face by one of my shoes. I think the White-haired

Master learned the truth by asking the Son of Ben Ali about it one night, when they were returning from a long ride together.

“In the midst of the excitement, old Mr. Gossett forgot all about the Son of Ben Ali. But after the wounded man had been carried to a doctor’s shop and physicked, and the doctors had said that he would recover, though the bruise was a serious one, Mr. Gossett remembered his purchase, and came out to the public square in some alarm, fearing that his newly-bought slave had given him the slip. But he had not far to seek. Though the public square was deserted, except for the horses and mules tied to the racks and a few people straggling aimlessly about, the Son of Ben Ali still sat on the sheriff’s block, erect and silent, his arms folded and his feet crossed. The trader’s wagons and his train of slaves had passed on through the town.

“When Mr. Gossett saw the Son of Ben Ali sitting where he had left him, he nodded his head approvingly. His son had come to town in a wagon, and in this the young man had to be carried home. Straw was spread in the body of the wagon, and into this George Gossett was lifted.

The old man had come in a buggy and he made the Son of Ben Ali sit beside him and drive him."

At this point the Gray Pony paused and bit at a speckled fly that was sitting on his fat side out of reach of the sweep of his tail.

"Is that all?" asked Buster John.

"It is enough," replied the Gray Pony. "A few days afterward, being on the far side of the plantation, I heard a plough mule telling Mr. Gossett's buggy horse that the Son of Ben Ali had gone to the woods."

The Gray Pony, saying this, turned and walked away.

V.

RAMBLER, THE TRACK DOG, BEGINS HIS STORY.

THE children thought that they had been treated somewhat impolitely by the Gray Pony, and so, as soon as they could find an opportunity, and when they thought he was in a good humor, they asked him why he walked away so abruptly and refused to tell them the reason Aaron went to the woods and what befell him when he got there.

“As for that,” the Gray Pony answered, “I know nothing of the matter of my own knowledge. It is all hearsay with me. The Son of Ben Ali can tell you. He knows. He was there.”

The children had to be content with this until they found an opportunity to talk with Aaron. He was very busy during the day, and sometimes at night, managing the affairs of the plantation, but he told them that whenever they saw a light in his cabin right after supper, he would have time to talk to them. This happened the next

night. Drusilla saw the light, and told Sweetest Susan and Buster John it was there, and in a few minutes they were all in Aaron's cabin.

They found him baking a hoecake and frying some bacon, and it smelt so good that Buster John's mouth began to water, although he had just eaten his supper.

"Uncle Aaron," he said, "I'll give you two biscuits and a piece of ham for a piece of your hoecake and some of your meat."

"Do so — do so," answered Aaron.

"Bring four biscuits and two pieces of ham," cried Sweetest Susan, as Buster John rushed out of the door. He returned in a little while with four biscuits, each sandwiched with a piece of ham. Whereupon Aaron turned over to the children all his hoecake and fried bacon, which they devoured with a relish which belongs to youth alone. This done, they gave Aaron to understand what they came for, and he, without any apology, explanation, or delay, such as a negro would have indulged in, and likewise without any humor, told his story. Perhaps there was no room for humor, but a negro would have found a place for it.

"I can't tell you the story as the field hands could," said Aaron. "They have a word for everything. What I know is that when I saw the little white boy crying about me, I was no longer the same man. Something swelled here" — touching his throat — "and something broke here" — striking his breast. "I had said to myself, be as cunning as a snake. My mind was made up to run away from the man that bought me, and follow the negro trader and strangle him in the night. He was a beast. I promised myself that he should live no more. The thoughts made me happy, and then I saw the white child, small and crippled, crying because his father had not bought me. I said, what is he to me? And then my hands shook and my knees trembled. Another man crept into my skin and looked out of my eyes. Not since my mother shook hands with me and told me good-by when I was a boy had I seen anybody crying for me. Then, I said, the man who gets me to-day will get a good bargain.

"In my mind there was but one thought — the child is my Little Master. The Gray Pony has told you what happened. It was to save the Little Master's father that I threw the horseshoe.

I thought the young man was killed, and I said, it is a pity! When I rode home with Mr. Gossett, I kept on saying it is a pity — a great pity; and when my new master asked me if I would treat him right, I smiled and told him I would do the best I could. And I did. I worked for him as hard as I ever worked for a man. But he never trusted me. He was always watching me.

“One night, just after sundown, he called me out of my hut — it was not a cabin — and said he wanted me to get in the one-horse wagon and take a bale of cotton to a neighbor’s house and sell it to him. At once I smelled trouble.

“‘But will the man buy it?’ I asked.

“The answer was: ‘He may; if he does, the money is yours. If not, no harm is done.’

“‘I am afraid of the patterrollers,’ said I.

“The answer was: ‘I’ll not be far away.’

“I had nothing else to do but go, but I knew there was trouble at the end of the road. I had seen negroes lashed for selling their masters’ things, and I had seen white men sent to jail for trading with negroes between two suns. I found out long afterward that Mr. Gossett’s neighbor

had some land that he refused to sell. He was not very well off, but he held to his land and made poor crops. If he bought the cotton from me, Mr. Gossett could buy his land or put him in jail. But this was all dark to me then.

“I mounted the wagon — But wait! Rambler, the track dog, is here. He knows what happened. I will call him.”

Aaron went to the door of his cabin, put his right hand to his mouth, and gave a musical halloo. The dogs were barking in another part of the lot, but they ceased instantly, as if listening. Then Watch, the catch dog, barked three times : —

“Who is it?”

Again Aaron gave the halloo, and this time it was answered by the quavering cry of a hound. Before the children learned the language of the animals, they would have said a dog was howling somewhere on the plantation, but now they knew that Rambler was saying : —

“I am c-o-m-i-n-g!”

In a few minutes he came running into the cabin, his hair damp with the dew. He looked rather sheepish, as the saying is, and crouched

near Aaron, as if he expected to be scolded. Once upon a time Rambler had been a black-and-tan, but he was now old, and the gray hairs had well-nigh obliterated the tan, and were encroaching on the black. His muzzle was very gray, and his dew-claws had grown until they were nearly an inch and a half long. One of his long ears was split a little at the end, the result of a skirmish with old Mr. Raccoon. He kept his eyes averted from Aaron and the children and seemed to be both humble and uneasy. He was better satisfied when Aaron told him what was wanted. Indeed, he became very lively and went about the room picking up the scraps of bread the children had dropped on the floor. Aaron went to his little pine cupboard and got out a pone of corn bread that he had saved from the day before. Rambler took the bread in his mouth and then placed it gently on the floor. Gently wagging his tail, he looked up in Aaron's face.

"Son of Ben Ali," he said, "I am getting old, and, what with gnawing bones and killing cats and fighting coons, my teeth are bad. This bread is hard."

Whereupon Aaron took the bread, crushed it in his hands, dropped it in an old tin platter, and placed it on the hearth.

"This would taste better, if it had ham gravy on it," remarked Rambler, after saying "Thanky" with his tail; "yes, a good deal better, but I'll not be choice."

When he had finished the bread, he seated himself near the chimney corner and licked his chops carefully.

"You want to know about that trip the Son of Ben Ali made to sell the cotton. But I don't even know how to begin. My tongue and my tail will be here talking and wagging, and my mind will be off in the woods hunting minks and coons and possums. You know how one thing leads to another. Well, if I get started I'll get things upside down, as the rabbit does when he tries to run down hill."

"When I started with the cotton," suggested Aaron, "you made up your mind to go with me."

"That's so," said Rambler. "I don't know why. I knew well enough you were n't going hunting. It was just a notion that seized me. I

trotted along, sometimes in front of the wagon and sometimes behind it. Before we had gone very far I happened to be in front of the wagon when a rabbit ran across the road. I dashed after it and bumped my head against a fence rail. It hurt so that I sat down by the roadside and waited for the pain to go away. The wagon went by and I concluded to go back home and go to bed in the shuckpen. I started back, but before I had gone far, I heard the clinking of bridle-reins and bits, and presently I saw two men on horseback.

"I stopped until they passed by. And then I saw that it was Old Grizzly and the overseer."

"Old Grizzly!" cried Buster John. "Who was he?"

"That was the name the negroes had for Mr. Gossett," Aaron explained.

"Old Grizzly and the overseer," Rambler continued, paying no attention to the interruption. "They were riding along after the wagon, but at some distance behind it. I says to myself, well, well! something is up. So, instead of going back home, I turned around and trotted along the road till I passed Old Grizzly and the over-



A RABBIT DASHED ACROSS THE ROAD

seer, and caught up with the wagon. I said to the Son of Ben Ali: —

“ ‘ Get down and fix one of your wagon wheels, and see who comes behind you.’

“ This he did, but when Old Grizzly and the overseer heard the Son of Ben Ali knocking on one of the wagon wheels with a rock, they stopped, and came no farther until after he drove on again. Then I knew, and the Son of Ben Ali knew, that Old Grizzly and the overseer were coming to see that orders were obeyed.

“ The house to which the Son of Ben Ali was carrying the cotton was not far. It was in the midst of a big grove of oak-trees. The trees were too big for the house, or the house was not fine enough for the trees, for they made everything so dark that, from the road, those who cannot see in the night would never know that a house was there.

“ The Son of Ben Ali drove the wagon under the trees, waited until he could hear the clinking of bridles and bits, as Old Grizzly and the overseer rode up, and then he slipped around the house and went to the back door. I waited until I saw Old Grizzly and the overseer stop under one of the big oaks, and then I followed.

"The Son of Ben Ali knocked at the back door, which was soon opened by a negro woman, who asked him what he wanted. He told her, and then the man came to the door.

" 'What do you want?' he asked.

" 'I want to see you,' said the Son of Ben Ali. 'I want to sell you a bale of cotton.'

| " 'Who is your master?' the man asked.

" 'Mr. Gossett,' the Son of Ben Ali answered.

" 'What is your name?'

" 'They call me Aaron.'

" 'You are the boy he bought not long ago.'

" 'Yes, sir.'

" 'Wait a moment.' The man went into another room, and when he appeared again he had a shotgun in his hands. My hide is not very thick, and so I went under the steps. The man seemed to be mad. The Son of Ben Ali had some such idea, for he asked : —

" 'What are you going to do with the gun, sir?'

" 'Get the truth out of you.'

" 'A dead man will neither lie nor tell the truth,' said the Son of Ben Ali. His voice sounded as if he might be laughing, but I was under the steps and could n't see.

“‘Is the cotton yours?’ the man asked.

“‘It is Mr. Gossett’s.’

“‘Why do you bring it here to-night?’

“‘I had my orders.’

“‘Oh, if I had the old scoundrel here!’ cried the man in a rage.

“‘If you talk loud, he’ll hear you,” said Aaron.

“The man understood at once. ‘Wait!’ he whispered. Then he slipped around the corner of the house. Suddenly I heard the gun go off, and it scared me so I could n’t help but cry out. Some one else yelled, too — some one under the oaks in front, and then I heard the snorting and stamping of horses. The Son of Ben Ali stole off in the dark before the man returned, and I followed him, not knowing what had happened or what might happen.

“But I soon found out, and it was not as bad as it might have been. The shot the man fired had shattered one of the overseer’s arms. He was not hurt so badly but he could ride his horse, and he and Old Grizzly hurried home as fast as they could.

“After a while the Son of Ben Ali followed,

but instead of riding in the wagon, he walked by the side of it, and I went ahead to see that the way was clear. The Son of Ben Ali knew that there was trouble in store for him, and he did n't want Old Grizzly to get hold of him."

"I don't see why," said Buster John.

"Why, Old Grizzly did n't know but the Son of Ben Ali had gone to the man's house and told him about the whole business. There was nobody else to tell the man, and if he knew that Old Grizzly and the overseer were waiting in the grove, of course he must have got the news from the Son of Ben Ali. But it happened that the overseer was so badly scared about his wounded arm that Old Grizzly had to go home and sit up with him, and this left the way clear for the Son of Ben Ali to take the mule and wagon and cotton where they belonged. He drove the wagon under the gin-shelter, unharnessed the mule and fed it, and then went to his hut and gathered up his belongings and took to the woods."

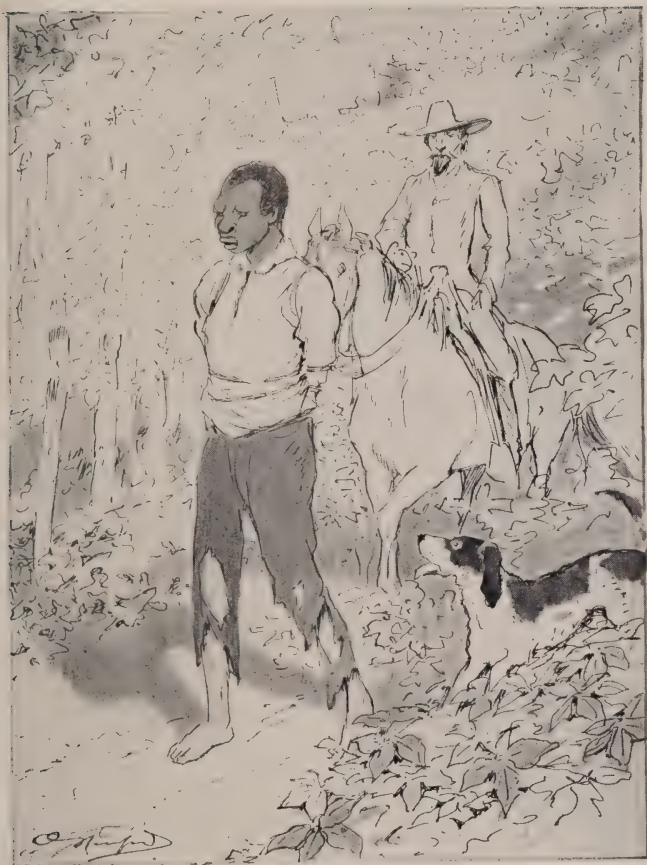
"Then he was a runaway," said Sweetest Susan. She looked at Aaron with new interest. She had often heard of runaways, but she had never seen one.

"Yes, he was a runaway," Rambler answered, "and it was a long time before he was anything else. I did n't bother my head about the Son of Ben Ali when he went to the woods, for I knew he was just as much at home there as I was. I stayed behind to see what would happen, and by staying I soon found out that I had made some trouble for myself.

"It was very curious, too, when you come to think about it. Old Grizzly behaved with so much meanness toward his negroes, half feeding and clothing them, and working them long after dark, that some of them were in the woods most of the time. Now, Old Grizzly's son, George, was very fond of fox-hunting, and some of his friends sent me to him when I was quite young. My whole family have a great name for running foxes, so it is said, and Old Grizzly's George wanted me to hunt foxes for him along with the other dogs. I did n't need any teaching in that business, for the minute I smelled a fox, no matter at what hour of the day or night, I felt bound to hunt him up and run him down. I had that feeling as far back as I can remember.

"One day, when I was very young, I was

playing at hunting with the little negroes just to pass the time away. One would hold me, and another would go far out of sight and hide. I had to use my nose to find him, and I soon came to enjoy the fun. Once Old Grizzly himself saw us playing, and he seemed to be very much pleased with the way I followed the trail of the little negroes. He took part in it himself, holding me while one of the children ran through the pasture and down the branch, and around by the gin-screw back to the house. He did this many times, and seemed to be very much pleased with me. After a while, when I grew older, he made some of the large negroes run, but I never failed to find and bay them. I soon found out why Old Grizzly was so well pleased. One morning, one of the negroes was missing. He had run away some time during the night, having been promised a strapping for the next morning. Old Grizzly called me, and we went to the negro's hut, where I was made to smell of his blanket and such of his belongings as he had failed to take with him. I knew at once what Old Grizzly wanted me to do, and I was more than willing to do it, for the negro



OLD GRIZZLY BROUGHT HIM BACK

happened to be one that had given me more kicks than scraps. I settled down to business at once. I ran for the hut, and circled around it. The scent was as plain to me as a track in the mud is to you. I followed it with no trouble at all, and Old Grizzly, having his horse ready, went along with me, keeping as close to me as he could. In an hour we had overtaken the negro, and Old Grizzly carried him back, making him walk before the horse all the way home.

“After that I had to look out for myself. The negroes treated me worse than ever. They were ready to kill me at any time, and I had to keep out of their way. This made it worse for the negroes. None of them could escape Old Grizzly by going to the woods. I had help, too, for some of the other hounds, seeing me made much of by the master and the overseer, joined me in my expeditions, and in a short while Old Grizzly had a pack of ‘nigger dogs,’ as he called us, that seemed to fill him with pride.

“This was going on when the Son of Ben Ali came — when he came and touched me and gave me the sign. And then I knew more than I had known before. After he came he was the

first to go into the woods, as I have told you, and the next morning my trouble began.

“Old Grizzly was very mad when, at daylight, he sent for the Son of Ben Ali and found him gone. I slept under the house in a corner of the chimney stack, and I heard Old Grizzly when he came in from the overseer’s house. He bawled at the cook for not having breakfast ready, though it was not time, and then he came out, ripping and rearing, and sent the house-boy for the Son of Ben Ali. But the Son of Ben Ali was not to be found. This made matters worse. Old Grizzly called up my companions and myself, gave us a few bites of stale bread, had his horse saddled, and then carried us to the hut where the Son of Ben Ali had lived.

“I knew then what was going to happen. I ought to have known before, but it had never occurred to me. We were to run the Son of Ben Ali down so that Old Grizzly could capture him. This didn’t suit me at all, but I had to go. There was no way to get out of it.”

“Oh, I don’t see why !” cried Sweetest Susan.

“Me, nuther,” Drusilla chimed in.

“It is simple enough,” said Rambler, placing

himself in a more comfortable position — he had been sitting on his haunches. “The other dogs would have gone whether I went or not. So I pretended I was very glad to go. I circled around the house, and ran over the scent twice so as to see what the other dogs would do. They ran over it, too, but I knew that one of them had a faint hint of it. He went back to it, and then” —

Here a spark from the pine knot that made a light in the cabin flew out near Rambler’s head, and suddenly burst into a shower of smaller sparks. Rambler dodged and jumped out of the way so quickly that the children laughed.

“You may think it is funny,” said Rambler, “and it may be, but I’ll not laugh until I see you with a hot spark in your ear.”

He settled himself again and resumed his story, but this time he kept one eye on the pine knot.

VI.

A RUN THROUGH THE WOODS.

“As I was saying,” Rambler went on, “the scent was as plain as the nose on your face, and, although I passed it over, one of the other dogs had a hint of it and whimpered over it. This dog afterwards made a very good track dog. He had what they call a cold nose, and he was hard headed enough to hang on. But at that time he was young and foolish, and new to the business. He had no mind of his own. So I went back to the trail, picked up the scent and went along with it slowly, as if it were a tedious job to unravel it.

“What I wanted to do was to follow it until it crossed some other trail, and then pick up the new one and carry Old Grizzly away from the Son of Ben Ali. But it was impossible. No one had passed, and so we ran on after the Son of Ben Ali.

“The next best thing to finding some other



I WAS CLOSE TO THE RABBIT

track, I thought, was to get out of sight of Old Grizzly. I let myself out a little, the other dogs did the same, and in a few moments we had left Old Grizzly behind. Right then I did something I have never done before, and that was to try to catch a rabbit, when I was hunting a different kind of game. While we were going along, full tilt, a big fat rabbit jumped up right under my nose. I dashed after it as hard as I could go, and the other dogs came tumbling after. I was so close to the rabbit that it turned before going into the swamp. I made it turn again, and it ran into the mouth of one of my companions. The others ran up, and they had quite a fight over the rabbit, tearing it to pieces in short order. I was hungry myself, and nothing would have pleased me better than to rush in and take the rabbit away from my companions. But I did n't have time.

“While the others were snapping and snarling I slipped into the swamp, ran across it and made a circle of a mile or more, and tried to pick up the scent again where I thought it ought to be. But it was not there. I knew then that the Son of Ben Ali had wandered

about, not knowing or caring where he went so long as he kept out of the way of Old Grizzly. I made another circle, and this time I picked up the scent again. I had said to myself when I was hunting for it that I would remain silent when I found it, but I came upon it so suddenly and unexpectedly, and it was so warm and fresh, that I cried out at the top of my voice. It was foolish, but such is habit. My companions heard it, and they came to me without delay. I knew they were coming, and the best I could do was to discover quickly which way the scent led, and then take the back track, trusting to the dullness of my companions to mislead them. By the time they came up I was tripping along toward the cold end of the trail as noisily as if the Son of Ben Ali were in plain view. The others, not to be outdone, joined in the cry, and we went bolting along the back track. In this way we came up with Old Grizzly, who seemed to be much astonished to see us running headlong in the way he had just come.

“The scent grew fainter and fainter, and everything would have gone well but for one of

my companions, the one that discovered the scent at the beginning of the hunt. When the scent grew colder, he began to circle around for himself, and about a half a mile away he picked it up with such a howl and a flourish that I ran up to him. It was so warm that I looked up, expecting to see the Son of Ben Ali trotting along a quarter of a mile away. But it was not so. He was not in sight.

"I joined in and took the lead, saying to myself that when we got into the woods I'd show my spotted companion a new wrinkle in trailing. When we came to the bushes I dropped back a little, seized my companion by the neck and dragged him around and shook him up in a way that surprised him and the others.

"'What's that for?' he cried. 'You're too spotted,' I replied. This quieted them down, but it was too late to carry out my new plans. The scent had been growing warmer and warmer, and I took it up again as a matter of duty, and the others followed in a more sober manner. We went through the woods at a pretty good pace, and I expected to see the Son of Ben Ali limping along ahead of us, ready

to drop, for we had now come several miles in doubling and twisting and turning.

“But instead of seeing the Son of Ben Ali, we saw something that was more surprising. We came upon a young man and a young lady. The young man had been hunting, for he had a gun, and the young lady had been gathering wild flowers, for a negro girl with her had a basketful.”

“I know! I know!” cried Drusilla. “Dat nigger ’oman wuz my mammy. I been hear ’er tell dat many an’ many’s de time. Yes, suh! dat wuz my mammy! An’ dat ain’t all. Dat ar white man an’ dat ar white ’oman wuz yo’ all’s pa an’ ma.”

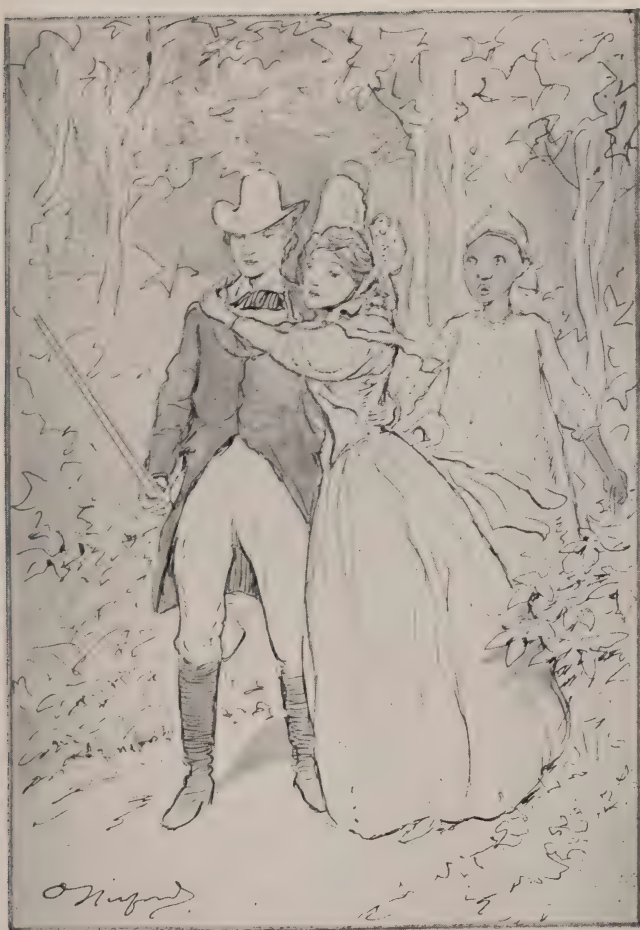
Buster John and Sweetest Susan looked at Aaron for confirmation or denial.

“That’s so,” Aaron said.

“Mammy say dey wuz courtin’,” explained Drusilla.

Buster John seemed to be somewhat embarrassed at this information, but Sweetest Susan appeared to relish it. On the other hand, Rambler went to Aaron and said:—

“Son of Ben Ali, it would please me much



MAMMY SAY DEY WUZ COURTIN'

if you would scrape your shoe just behind my shoulders. A colony of fleas has settled there, because they know I can reach them neither with my teeth nor with my hind feet."

Aaron performed this service willingly, and the scraping seemed to tickle Rambler so that he raised one of his hind feet from the ground, and made believe to be scratching himself, but his foot was simply moving up and down in the air. At this the children laughed very heartily.

"Well," said Rambler, "when we ran up on the young man and the young lady there was a great flurry. The negro girl screamed, and the young lady rushed into the arms of the young man for protection. My companions and I ran around and circled, but all trace of the Son of Ben Ali had disappeared.

"I found the warm scent of a horse, but there was no horse to be seen. I thought this very strange, so I followed it a few hundred yards, but said nothing to my companions about it. The scent led out of the woods, through a field in which the brown sedge grew high, and, in going through this, I caught the scent of the Son of Ben Ali. It was high on the sedge, and I

knew by this that the horse had the Son of Ben Ali for a rider. But I said nothing to my companions. I turned away from the horse's trail, and continued to go in a circle, until, coming to the point where the young man had entered the woods, I made some fuss over it, and thus drew my companions away from the sedge field. They came to me, but I told them it was a mistake, and in this way cooled them off, so that they were no longer as keen to find the trail of the Son of Ben Ali as they had been.

"I have told pretty much all I know about it," continued Rambler, dodging another spark. "It happened that the young man who was out there in the woods with the young lady was the man to whom Old Grizzly had sent the Son of Ben Ali with the bale of cotton."

"Was it really papa and mamma?" asked Buster John, turning to Aaron.

Aaron laughed and nodded his head.

"Well, they've never told me anything about it," said Sweetest Susan, in an injured tone.

"Nor me either," remarked Buster John.

"Huh!" exclaimed Drusilla, "folks don't hafter tell dey chilluns all dey know."

Just then a loud, but mellow voice outside cried out : " Drusilla ! You Drusilla ! You better answer me gal ! I boun' I 'll make you talk when I git holt er you ! "

Drusilla put her head outside the door and yelled out : " Ma'am ! "

" Come 'ere dis minnit, madam ! Whar is you ? "

" At Unk A'on's house, mammy ! "

" Tell her, Uncle Aaron says he wants to see her," said Buster John. This Drusilla did, and presently Drusilla's mother was heard coming along the path, breathing dire vengeance against Drusilla, and wondering what in the world Aaron wanted.

" Is that you, Jemimy ? " asked Aaron. " Come in — don't be scared."

Jemimy came in laughing, and her smile was in queer contrast to the threats she had just made against her daughter.

" What you-all doin' here ? " she said, seeing the white children. " Unk Aaron is sho got mo' time fer ter fool wid you dan what I got. An' dar's dat ol' dog settin' up dar big ez anybody. What you want, honey ? " turning to Buster

John. "Talk quick. I ain't got no time ter th'ow way. I got ter go up yonder," indicating the big house, "and set my mornin's bread ter rise." Then she turned to Aaron, "Did you call me sho' nuff, er is deze yer chillun des runnin' on wid der foolishness?"

Aaron nodded his head and brought out a stool for himself, giving Jemimy the chair in which he had been sitting.

"I 'clar'. I ain't got no time fer ter be settin' down here gwine on wid deze chillun. Time yo' Unk A'on know much 'bout you ez what I does he won't be settin' down here worryin' 'long wid you."

Jemimy said this, laughing in an embarrassed way. She stood in awe of Aaron, but she sat down. "What you grinnin' at, I like ter know?" she cried, turning suddenly on Drusilla, to hide her own confusion. "Whar yo' manners?"

Aaron shook his head and Drusilla made no reply.

"Aunt Mimy," said Buster John, "we want you to tell us about the time you went into the woods with mamma — when Uncle Aaron was a

runaway, and when Mr. Gossett was running him with dogs."

Jemimy laughed, and then she looked serious. She looked first at the children and then at Aaron. At last, her eye fell on Rambler, who had crossed the hearth and was sitting between Aaron and the chimney-jamb.

"Ef I ain't mighty much mistaken," said Jemimy, "dat ar very dog dar is one er de dogs what wuz runnin' atter you." Aaron nodded his head. "He gittin' ol', mon. Why, dat ar dog ain't fur frum twenty year ol'." Jemimy paused, but nobody said anything. Finally she went on:

"I never is ter fergit dat day, ef I wuz ter live ter be older dan ol' man Methusalem. I speek I wuz 'bout fourteen year ol', an' Miss Rachel, she wuz 'bout eighteen or nineteen — some'rs 'long in dar. Soon one mornin' she sont me out ter tell ol' Unk Aberham fer ter saddle de pacin' filly. She low she gwineter go out in de woods atter some wil' flowers, an' she says she want me ter go 'long wid 'er. So dey done saddle de filly, en put Miss Rachel on 'er, an' den Miss Rachel, she rid up side de fence an' tuck me on behine 'er, bein's ez de filly done been trained to tote

double. I had er basket on my arm, an' dat ar basket sholy did worry dat hoss. She danced an' she pranced, an' twuz e'en'bout all I could do ter set up dar, her back wuz so slick.

"But bimeby de filly done git usen ter de basket, an' atter dat I ax Miss Rachel whar she gwine. She say she gwine atter some wil' flowers. I ax her wharbouts. I 'low'd dey wuz plenty right whar we wuz at. She up'n say dey want 'nuff ter suit her. We rid on an' rid on, an' bimeby I say, 'Miss Rache, you know you ain't gwine atter no flowers.' She ax me wharbouts she gwine den. I say, 'You er gwine over yon'er in de big woods.' She ax what she gwine over dar for. I say" —

Here Jemimy straightened herself up and looked at Aaron curiously.

"I 'clar ter gracious, I ought n't ter be tellin' dis 'fo' deze yer chillun," she said.

Aaron made no reply one way or another, but seemed to be surprised, and the children protested loudly.

"You 'll run right straight an' tell Miss Rachel!" exclaimed Jemimy, as indignantly as if the children had already told their mother.

"Why, mamma knows it already — if it 's true," said Buster John scornfully.

"She 'd run me off'n de place ef she know'd I wuz runnin' on 'bout ol' times right here 'fo' you all. La! niggers is fools, mo' speshually when dey er wimmen folks."

"I reckon she 's about right," said Rambler, yawning and stretching himself.

"What kinder cu'us fuss is dat dog makin'?" asked Jemimy, seeing Aaron and the children laughing. "I ain't never see no dog make fuss like dat. You all better watch dat dog. He so ol', dey ain't no tellin' when he'll go ravin'."

"You told mamma she was going to the big woods," said Buster John, by way of a reminder.

"She wa'n't yo' ma den!" remarked Jemimy. "I say, 'You ain't gwine atter no flowers. You er gwine over yon'er in de big woods.' She ax me what she gwine over dar fer. I say, 'You er gwine dar kaze you speck you'll strike up wid dat ar Dave Henry Wyche.' Man, suh! She blush up twel it look like you kin see plum thoo her ears, dey got so red. Atter while she ax me who tol' me dat, an' I say, 'How come my eyeballs ain't big nuff fer me ter tell myse'f?'"

“We rid ’long, an’ rid ’long, an’ den bimeby she low dat Mr. Wyche des ez good ez anybody else, ef he ain’t got ez much prop’ty ez some er de res’. I say, ‘I ain’t’ sputin’ dat, but how come you call ’im Mr. Wyche now, when you been callin’ ’im Dave Henry yever since he toted yo’ school bucket when you wa’n’t knee-high to a goslin’?’ Den she say it’s kaze dey done got older dan what dey useter wuz.

“We rid on, an’ rid on, an’ bimeby we come ter whar de big poplar grows dar in de woods. Right dar she w’o’d de filly, an’ tol’ me ter jump down, kaze right dar whar she gwine ter git some wil’ flowers. I hilt de hoss, I did, an’ she lipt down same ez a bird off’n de bush, an’ den she tuck de basket an’ went sa’nterin’ ’roun’.

“I ’low, ‘Ef you gwine ter git any flowers right roun’ here, you ’ll hafter dig in de groun’ atter ’em,’ an’ she say I better be ’tendin’ ter my business, an’ hol’ dat ar filly so she won’t break loose an’ run away. Well, dat sorter brung me ’roun’, kaze I skeerd er hosses anyhow, but I hilt on ter de bridle reins, an’ I kep’ one eye on Miss Rachel, an’ de udder one on de filly. Miss Rachel, she went on thoo’ de woods, sorter hum-

min' one er dem ar ol' time chunes, an' I foller'd 'long atter de bes' way I could, kaze I skeer'd dat ar filly gwine ter walk up behine me an' tromple me. Bimeby, I see somebody gwine 'long thoo de woods wid a gun. I look right good, an' den I know'd 'twuz Marse Dave Henry Wyche.

“Well suh! you dunner how quare folks is. Miss Rachel she seed 'im 'mos' time I did, an' den she stopped and fetched a little squall, des like she did n't know all de time he wuz gwine ter be dar, an' den Marse Dave Henry, he stopped like he wuz 'stonished, an' tuck off his hat like he ain't seed Miss Rachel in a mont' er Sundays. Den dey shuck han's an' stood dar an' talked an' talked. I dunner what dey say, but one time Marse Dave Henry would laugh, an' look down at his foots, an' den Miss Rachel, she'd snicker an' blush. Dey wuz gwine on dat way when I feel de filly pullin' on de reins, an' den when I look at 'er, she had her ears sot forrerd, like she wuz lis'nin' at sump'n. Den I hear houn's a-bayin', an' des 'bout dat time I hear de bushes shakin', an' somebody come chargin' 'long hard ez he kin come.

“Dis make de filly jerk back and r’ar, but I swung on ter de bridle rein, an’ holler w’oa, an’ den, bimeby, she w’oad. Well, suh, dat ar somebody chargin’ ’long wuz yo’ Unk A’on dar. De dogs was a-gainin’ on ’im eve’y jump. He seed Miss Rachel an’ Marse Dave Henry stan’in’ dar, an’ he went up ter whar dey wuz, an’ say : ‘ You see what I git fer tellin’ you las’ night.’ Marse Dave Henry ’low, ‘ I wish ter God I could help you ! ’ Miss Rachel riz on her tiptoes, an’ stretch out her han’ an’ say, ‘ Take dat filly dar an’ ride her home fer me ! ’ She looked lots bigger dan what Marse Dave Henry did. I tell you now, when you git de Abercrombie blood stirred up you better go off som’rs twel it cool off.

“ Well, Unk A’on dar, he fetched a jump er two an’ jerked de reins out’n my han’, an’ lipt on de filly’s back — behine de side-saddle, now, mind you — an’ hit her wid his heels a time er two, an’ wuz done gone ’fo’ I could git up offin’ de groun’ whar I fell at. Den Marse Dave Henry flung his gun ’cross his lef’ arm an’ put some fresh caps on it, an’ dar he hilt it.

“ Bimeby, here come de dogs. Dey sailed ’roun’, an’ sailed ’roun’, but dey could n’t go no

fudder. Den here come dat ol' Mr. Gossett. I hope he 'll go ter heaven, but I never shill b'lieve it twel I see 'im dar. He come a-follerin' long atter de dogs. He rid up an' tuck off his hat when he see Miss Rachel. But na'er one un um do like dey know he 's a-livin'. Miss Rachel she look at Marse Dave Henry, an' Marse Dave Henry, he look right straight at ol' Mr. Gossett. He sot dar on his hoss an' look at um, an' thump de pummel er his saddle like he studyin' 'bout sump'n 'way off yon'er — an' den he spied me. He lif' his hat agin, like he tellin' um good-by, an' den he rid up by me. He say, 'Gal, is you seed any nigger man runnin' 'long by here?' I look at Miss Rachel, an' she drapt her eyeleds. I say, 'Yasser.' He say, 'Which away wuz he gwine?' I look at Miss Rachel, an' she thow her eyes over ter de lef', an' I pint dat way an' 'low, 'Cross yon'er.' He sot dar, dat ar white man did, an' look at me n' thump de pummel er his saddle, en den he broke out in a big laugh an' rid on. I tell you now, ol' Nick wa'n't no sharper dan dat ar white man.

"Marse Dave Henry made a motion like he wuz gwine ter foller on atter ol' Mr. Gossett, but

Miss Rachel, she laid her han' on his arm, an' den we all walked back home. De las' word I say ter Miss Rachel — an' she 'll tell you so herse'f — wuz, 'I tol' you you wa'n't huntin' no flowers;' an' she 'low, 'How kin anybody hunt flowers when de woods is full er runaway niggers an' dogs?' an' I say, 'You ain't call de name er all what de woods wuz full uv;' an' she 'low ef I don't hush up, she'll be mad wid me all de balance er de week, an' den I hushed up."

Jemimy paused, looked all around, and then turned to the children: —

"Don't you dast ter tell yo' ma dat I been gwine on wid all dish yer ol' time foolishness, kaze ef you do, she'll take me out'n de kitchen an' sen' me ter de cotton patch, an' I'm doin' mighty well whar I is."

Then, after telling Drusilla not to be sitting up all night, she went out.

VII.

RAMBLER, THE TRACK DOG, CONCLUDES HIS STORY.

“WHERE did you go when you rode the filly off?” Buster John asked Aaron.

“He came right here,” said Rambler; “I know it, because when old Grizzly whistled to me and my companions and started home, I went back, picked up the scent of the filly, and followed it here. At the lot, the Son of Ben Ali took the saddle off, hung it under the shed, and then came to this house.”

“That is so,” remarked Aaron; “an old man by the name of Abe lived here.”

“Why, I remember old Uncle Abe,” said Buster John. “He used to sit in the sun and make horse collars and baskets, and tell tales.”

“He was a great hand for that,” assented Aaron.

“I followed him here,” continued Rambler, “but found the door shut. I scratched at it and

whined. The man named Abe opened it, and I came in, but I did n't see anything of the Son of Ben Ali. But I knew he was in here. My nose told me so. I noticed some planks across the rafters—they are there yet, as you can see—and I looked up and whined. The man named Abe looked around until he found his axe. 'So you are Gossett's nigger dog,' he said. 'Well, you'll never hunt any more niggers for him.'

"'What is that?' said the Son of Ben Ali from the loft.

"'Gossett's nigger dog,' said the man named Abe. 'He has followed you here. What shall I do with him?'

"'Give him something to eat,' answered the Son of Ben Ali, and this made me glad, for I had had a long, a hot, and a hard chase.

"'What shall I do then?' asked the man named Abe.

"'Give him a drink of clean water,' replied the Son of Ben Ali.

"'What then?'

"'Then let him alone.'

"Now, I was very glad of that," continued Rambler, licking his chops, and keeping one eye



I LOOKED UP AND WHINED

on the sputtering pine knot that gave out a flickering light, "for I wanted bread, and I wanted water, and I wanted to lie down and rest somewhere, where I would n't have to fight the flies.

"So the man named Abe went into his cupboard — that same cupboard there — and gave me a big chunk of ash cake, and placed a pan of water close by. Then he sat in the door and began to weave his baskets. I ate all he gave me, drank as much water as I wanted, and crept under a low bedstead that stood in the corner yonder.

"I don't know how long I slept, but when I woke I knew it was night, for I heard the man named Abe frying his bacon, and the smell of it crept under the bed where I was, and made me as hungry as I had been before I ate. After a while I heard voices. The Son of Ben Ali was asking the man named Abe if he would have to stay in the loft on the planks all night. The man named Abe said no, that he had a snug place for the Son of Ben Ali.

"Now, at that time there was a sort of closet or something near where the chimney juts out here. The man named Abe had nailed some

planks across from the wall to the edge of the chimney, and in between the wall and the planks there was room enough for a man to stand up, or to lie down, if he lay on his side.

“After a while, when everything was quiet, the Son of Ben Ali clambered down the wall, but when he touched the floor he stumbled and fell over, groaning. The man named Abe was scared nearly to death, but it was nothing. I had been running hard, and I was stiff and sore. The Son of Ben Ali had been running hard, and he was stiff and sore. Besides, he had been lying on the planks in the loft in a cramped position, not daring to move, for fear he would be discovered, and this made the matter worse. But it was nothing, after all. The Son of Ben Ali raised himself, laughing, and limped into the closet.

“But he did n’t stay there long. He came out to stretch himself. This made the man named Abe uneasy, and then he became angry. But the Son of Ben Ali simply laughed at him. This made him still angrier, and he threatened to go to the white folk’s house — that’s what he called it — and tell them that a runaway negro

had taken possession of his cabin. The man named Abe started out. I don't know whether he would have gone if he had been let alone, but he was not let alone. The Son of Ben Ali seized him by the shoulders and jammed him down on his stool, and then stood over him. The man named Abe would have cried out, but the Son of Ben Ali placed his hand softly on the man's mouth and spoke one word — 'Listen !' — but that was enough.

"The man named Abe quieted down at once. But he said he would be killed if the white people caught him hiding a runaway. At this, the Son of Ben Ali called me to him and said : —

" 'Go out and stand by the door there. When you hear any one coming, say so.' "

"I limped out from under the bed the best I could, for I was stiff, and scratched at the door and asked to be let out. The man named Abe opened the door, and watched to see what I would do. I only went a few steps away from the door, and then sat down, turning my head in all directions and listening. When the man named Abe shut the door again, I went and sat on the steps. I heard the man ask the Son of

Ben Ali if he was a witch, and the reply he got was that the Son of Ben Ali was witch enough not to be caught any more. Then the man named Abe wanted to know if the Son of Ben Ali was angry with him, and the answer he got was that the Son of Ben Ali was the friend of those who were his friends and was never angry with them.

“ Well, they had their supper in there, for I could hear them chewing, and presently the man named Abe came to the door and gave me mine, the biggest half of a warm hoe-cake, and I don’t know that plain bread ever tasted better than it did right then.

“ Not long after that I heard some one laughing and talking in the direction of the big house up yonder, and the sounds seemed to get nearer. I gave the warning, and I soon heard the Son of Ben Ali go into the closet. The voices came nearer, and I soon knew one for the Young Mistress, whom I had heard talking in the woods that very morning. The other seemed to be the voice of a child, but I heard thump — thump — thump — as of some one walking with a heavy cane. So I said to myself the Master is with

them. But, no ; it was the little boy, who walked with the crutches, as I soon saw. He was pleading with his sister to come to the house of the man named Abe and get him to tell a tale, such as he used to tell her when she was a little girl. She said she was too large for that, but the Little Master declared that he was small enough for both of them. And so they came to the door.

“The Young Mistress called out ‘Uncle Abe!’ and the man named Abe opened the door. He looked out cautiously, and with a frown on his face, as I could see ; but when he found who it was he danced around, and opened the door as nimbly as if he had been a young man. I try to be polite myself, and sometimes I shake my tail pretty hard, but the man named Abe shook his whole body, he was so polite, and bowed nearly to the floor. And it was n’t put on, neither, as I found out afterward, for every one on the place loved the Young Mistress and Little Master. These two went in, and I followed them. I wanted to see what would happen.

“After a while, in bustling around, one of them stepped on my foot. Of course this hurt my feelings, and I cried out.

“‘Poor doggie!’ said the Little Master. ‘Come here!’ He looked at me closely, and exclaimed:—

“‘Why, this is one of the Gossett track dogs! What is he doing here?’

“But the man named Abe said he didn’t know. Then the Young Mistress wondered if I was one of the dogs that had been running after a negro in the woods that morning, and she asked the man named Abe, looking at him hard, if he had seen a strange negro bring the filly home. But the man named Abe shook his head and fumbled with the splits which he wove into baskets.

“The Little Master said he had come to hear a story, one of those old stories about Brother Fox and Brother Rabbit. I thought to myself that if all the rabbits I had caught could talk, they would have more stories to tell than the Little Master had time to listen to. The man named Abe shuffled around and coughed and excused himself, but it was no use. I knew he wanted the Young Mistress and the Little Master to go away. He was uneasy about the Son of Ben Ali—afraid that they might discover the runaway. But nothing would satisfy the Little

Master but a story, and so the man named Abe sat down and told him one. And then nothing would satisfy him but another story, and so they went on, until finally I fell asleep by the hearth. I could hear the story-telling going on in my dreams, and I remember I said to myself that if the man named Abe, or any other man, was as willing to work as he was to talk, a good many things would be different.

“While I was lying there dozing, I heard the Son of Ben Ali begin to snore. The Little Master heard it too, for he asked what the noise was. The man named Abe said it was the dog — meaning me — and then he went on with his story, moving his feet about on the floor and talking loud. I dozed off again, and was getting ready to go to sleep sure enough, for I was tired, when suddenly I heard a noise outside, as of two or three persons creeping around the cabin. I jumped up and ran to the door and smelt under it. The scent that came under the door was the scent of strange persons, and of white people at that. Just as I was about to cry out my discovery I got a whiff of another scent. I knew at once that George Gossett was with the strange

persons, and that they were patrolling the settlement searching for the Son of Ben Ali.

"I gave one whine, and ran under the bed, for I did n't want young Grizzly to see me there.

" 'What is the matter with the dog?' asked the Young Mistress, in some alarm.

" 'Sh-h!' said the man named Abe, softly.

"Then some one struck the door with a cane, following it with a loud demand:—

" 'Hello, here! Open this door!'

"Peeping from under the bed, I watched to see what would happen. The man named Abe looked hard at the Young Mistress. She, rising, swung the chair behind her, leaning on it with her left hand. She lifted her right arm and waved it toward the door.

" 'Open it!' she said.

"The man named Abe did as he was bid. He threw it open suddenly and stood behind it. Young Grizzly must have been leaning heavily against it, for he stumbled into the room and came near falling.

" 'What are you trying to do? Why you'— Then, looking up, he caught sight of the Young Mistress standing there with anger in her face.

Young Grizzly took off his hat and bowed low. There were pieces of sticking-plaster on his forehead and cheek bones. He caught his breath and stammered: 'I beg your pardon, ma'am, I' —

" 'Uncle Abe,' said the Young Mistress, 'go to the house and tell father that Mr. Gossett — Mr. George Gossett — has called to see him on business, but has missed his way.'

" 'Not at all, Miss Rachel! Not at all! I beg ten thousand pardons! I was hunting a runaway nigger in the settlement, and I thought perhaps — maybe — I might find him here. A runaway nigger you know, Miss Rachel, is just as apt to be in one place as another.' In this way spoke young Grizzly, as he backed out at the door, still bowing.

" 'Then, Uncle Abe, tell father that Mr. George Gossett believes one of his runaways is hid on his place, and wants to find him.'

" 'By no means, Miss Rachel — by no means! Not for the world. You know me too well not to know that I never intended any disrespect to you. Not the least bit in the world.' So said young Grizzly.

“ ‘Who are your companions, sir?’ asked the Young Mistress, going toward the door.

“ ‘Just some of the neighbor boys, ma’am. I asked them to come with me. None of us meant the least harm, and certainly no disrespect to you.’ Thus spoke young Grizzly.

“By this time his companions had taken to their heels, and young Grizzly was quick to follow their example as soon as he got out of reach of the Young Mistress’s eyes. So said the man named Abe, and he was standing where he could see, having pretended to go after the White-haired Master. Never have I seen a white man more frightened than young Grizzly was.”

“What was he afraid of?” asked Sweetest Susan.

“Buckshot,” replied Aaron.

Rambler yawned and then continued : —

“The Little Master was even angrier than the Young Mistress, but he had said nothing. When the door was shut he struck the floor with his crutch and cried out : —

“ ‘Oh, I hope it is Aaron they are after, and I hope they will never get him.’

“ ‘Aaron is his name,’ said the man named Abe.



YOUNG GRIZZLY BOWED LOW

“‘He rode my filly home to-day,’ the Young Mistress said.

“‘Did he? Did he? I’ll kiss you, sis, for that!’ So spoke the Little Master, and he was as good as his word. He hopped nearly across the floor on his crutches and smacked the Young Mistress right in the mouth.

“I was wondering whether the Son of Ben Ali was sleeping all this time, so I went and sat by the closet. I could hear the Son of Ben Ali breathing very hard, and I said to myself, if he is not asleep, he is sitting in there crying.”

Sweetest Susan looked at Aaron, and her beautiful eyes were full of tears. Aaron shook his head and smiled, and then pretended to be gazing at something in the fireplace.

“He may have been laughing,” continued Rambler, licking his foreleg, where a briar had scratched it, “but as there was nothing to laugh at, that I could see, I thought maybe he was crying. But maybe he was n’t. I’m never certain of anything until I get my nose on it, and there was a wall between the Son of Ben Ali and me.

“The Young Mistress and the Little Master

were very angry, but before they could say much a very curious thing happened. The door of the closet flew open, and the Son of Ben Ali tumbled out in a heap on the floor. The Young Mistress fell back a step or two and gave a little scream, but the Little Master stood his ground and lifted his crutch in a threatening manner. But the Son of Ben Ali simply fell out of the closet in a heap. He was still stiff and sore, and by the time he had gathered himself together the Young Mistress knew who he was, and in a moment, too, the Little Master knew him.

“‘Why, it’s Aaron!’ he cried, though nobody ever told me why any one ever called the Son of Ben Ali Aaron.

“Then he seized the Son of Ben Ali’s hand, and stood leaning against him for support, as he did many and many a day and night after, as I have seen. The Little Master’s head came no higher than the Son of Ben Ali’s shoulder, though the child was standing on his feet, and the Son of Ben Ali on his knees.

“The Young Mistress said: ‘If you stay here they will catch you, sure.’

“The Son of Ben Ali shook his head, and the man named Abe made this reply: ‘No, ma’am, they ’ll not come back here in a hurry, after hearing what you said.’

“At this, they all laughed, except the Son of Ben Ali. ‘You may be certain,’ he said, ‘that I ’ll not stay here where I can be seen. The Gossett negroes go hungry every day in the year, and for an extra pint of meal they would tell everything they know and more too. And I would be the last to blame them.’

“Then suddenly the Little Master spoke: ‘Can you climb a tree?’

“‘By this time I ought to know how,’ said the Son of Ben Ali.

“‘Then come, I ’ll show you.’ So saying, the Little Master swung himself on his crutches and went hopping to the door as nimbly as if his legs were sound and whole. And the Young Mistress went too, and I followed.

“But by the time the Little Master had reached the door the Son of Ben Ali was out and before him.

“‘You are such a good rider, I ’ll be your horse,’ said the Son of Ben Ali.

“He took the crutches, leaned them against the door, and swung the Little Master to his broad back, picking up the crutches, and sore as he was, pretended to be a horse. We went toward the big house.

“If you will notice, the stump of a big oak tree stands near the back porch. Before the tree was killed by fire, a big limb stretched to the little balcony above the porch. At least, it used to be so. The Little Master showed this tree and the limb and the balcony to the Son of Ben Ali, and told him that the big window that opened on the balcony was in his room. And he said to him:—

“‘Whenever at night you feel lonely and tired, climb these stairs and come to my room. Many a night I lie awake and count the stars, and I should like to have you there to talk to me. You may come to-night, if you will.’

“The Son of Ben Ali stood a moment after he had placed the Little Master on the steps and given him his crutches.

“‘Not to-night — not to-night, Little Master. But before long I’ll come. To-night I must go into the woods and find me a hiding-place.’

“So said the Son of Ben Ali, and then he seized the Little Master’s hand and kissed it, bowed to the Young Mistress, whistled for me, and went off into the woods humming an old tune that made me feel sorry.”

At this point Rambler tried to scratch between his shoulders, first with one hind foot and then with the other. Then he tried to bite the fleas, but he could n’t reach them, being old and stiff ; and he sat and whined so pitifully that Aaron rubbed his back with a pine knot. This seemed to give him great relief, so much so that, hearing the dogs barking in another part of the lot, he ran out at the door to join them, and soon the deep mellow sound of his voice was heard baying with the rest.

Shortly afterward the children bade Aaron good-night, and it was n’t long before they were all in bed and sound asleep.

VIII.

GRUNTER, THE WHITE PIG.

WHEN the children awoke the next morning, they found that they were as much puzzled as ever about Aaron. He had escaped from Mr. Gossett and the patrol, and he had gone into the woods; but what then? What did he do there? How long did he stay? There were a thousand questions they wanted to ask. So the next time they saw Aaron, and each time thereafter, they begged him to tell them this and tell them that, until finally he said he would take them over to the two-mile place some fine day, and show them the White Pig.

Now, on that plantation, the White Pig was a well-known character. His history was a short one, but it was enough. A good many years before that, an old sow, with thirteen pigs following her, concluded to go traveling. She refused to come up to be fed when the other hogs were called. Nobody knew the reason.

The hog feeder had a beautiful song to call them with, and a strong, melodious voice with which to sing the song — a voice that could be heard from one end of the plantation to the other. But however long or however loud he might call, the old sow with her thirteen pigs kept close in the swamp.

Day after day the hog feeder called; day after day he expected them to come; and day after day they failed to come. After so long a time he went to hunt them. The old sow he found, but her pigs were missing. Some said the foxes and wildcats had caught the young ones, and some said they had gone wild in the swamp. But when the negroes planted their watermelon and goober patches, they soon found out that not all of the pigs had been caught.

Then a great effort was made to catch them. Some were run down and caught with dogs, and some were shot; but one, the most mischievous of all, was never caught. He kept out of the way of the guns, and he ripped open and killed all the dogs that came within reach of him. He was fleet of foot and cunning. He never came out of the canebrake except at night, and

he was so white and swift that the negroes came to be afraid of him. They said to themselves that a pig that could fool the white people and outrun a pack of foxhounds must be something more than a common pig.

Consequently, when they were going through the fields at dead of night and heard the White Pig crunching goobers, or chewing sugar-cane, or smacking his mouth over a yam potato, they said nothing, but slipped away as fast as they could, and left him to the enjoyment of his feast. This went on until the White Pig grew to be strong and dangerous. His tusks, or tushes, as the negroes called them, were long and sharp. He could kill as many dogs as could be piled upon him. When a catch dog was sent after him, he had a great trick of running until the dog came close enough, and then wheeling and ripping the pursuer's hide open.

It came to pass that the sport of hunting the White Pig grew too dangerous to be indulged in, so he was left to roam in the swamps and cane-brakes with no one to molest. It happened, too, that as soon as he was left alone, the White Pig ceased to molest the watermelons, sugar-canes,



THE WHITE PIG GREW STRONG AND DANGEROUS

sweet potatoes, goobers, and other truck, which the negroes were allowed to raise in order to make themselves a little pocket money. For a long time this was the wonder of the plantation, and yet none of the patches planted by the negroes were torn up and destroyed. Then, as everybody got used to this state of things, it ceased to be astonishing, and was no longer talked of. And some of the negroes even forgot that the White Pig was still at large, ready and willing to kill and cripple the biggest pack of dogs that could be sent against him.

This, then, was the White Pig that Aaron said he would have to show the children. Many and many a time they had been told not to go too far from the house for fear the White Pig would catch them. They had been taught to regard the White Pig as the Booger-Bear of the plantation, and they, as well as the negroes, stood greatly in awe of him, the more so as they had never seen him. It is no wonder, therefore, that they looked at one another with some astonishment when Aaron told them that he would have to take them to the two-mile place and show them the White Pig.

"I speck he's tired of foolin' 'long wid us," said Drusilla, by way of explanation, "an' I don't blame him much, kaze you-all been a-follerin' atter him an' a-ding-dongin' at him twel he done plum' wo' out."

"You too!" exclaimed Buster John.

"Not me!" protested Drusilla. "No, suh! I ain't been a-ding-dongin' atter Unk A'on; I ben a-follerin' atter you-all, an' dat what Mistiss tol' me ter do. Ef I don't do it, she'll make me tote water fer mammy ter wash de cloze wid, an' I know mighty well I don't want ter do dat."

But Aaron, as it turned out, was not joking at all. So, one pleasant morning, when he saw them playing in the spring lot, he gave them to understand that the time had come for them to make the acquaintance of the White Pig, and Buster John said he was quite ready; but Sweetest Susan looked at Drusilla and hesitated a little. Drusilla looked at Sweetest Susan and hesitated a good deal. In fact, she drew back.

"Now, I tell you what," she said, "you-all kin go on out dar in de swamp an' le' me stay here, an' den when you come back you kin set down an' tell me all 'bout it."

"But mamma said you were to go with us wherever we went," Sweetest Susan reminded her.

"Dat what she say," replied Drusilla, "yit she ain't tell me to go wid you out dar whar dat ar wil' hog is, which he done cripple a hoss an' kilt a yardful er dogs. Unk A'on kin take keer er you lots better dan what I kin."

"Come on," said Buster John to Sweetest Susan. "Let her stay if she wants to."

"Yes," remarked Aaron, "she's big enough to go to the field now. We need her there right now."

This did n't suit Drusilla at all, so she ran toward the others, laughing.

"I wuz des foolin'," she said. "I des wanted ter see what you-all gwine ter do. You may not need me, but I'm gwine anyhow, an' ef de White Pig git me, you'll hatter answer to Mistiss for it."

Aaron hitched a mule to the plantation cart, and in this rig they made their way to the two-mile place. They jogged along the little-used road, the journey being enlivened by some of the queer songs that Aaron was in the habit of sing-

ing when he was in a good humor. They went nearly to the river—the Oconee—and then Aaron turned out of the plantation road, and drove straight through the woods and bushes until they came in sight of a big cane-brake. Here he stopped, took the mule from the cart, and fastened him with a long tether, so that he could browse around, and nibble the grass and bushes. Then he lifted Sweetest Susan to his broad shoulders, took Buster John by the hand, and went toward the cane-brake. He went on until he came to the damp ground near the edge of the swamp. Selecting a dry place—a little knoll higher than the rest—Aaron stationed the children there, and then went to the verge of the cane-brake. Here he paused, placed his two hands to his mouth, and gave utterance to a peculiar call, or cry. It sounded as if he were trying to say, “Goof—goof—goof!” but had smothered the noise with his hands. It was loud enough to be heard a considerable distance, however, for after he had repeated the call three times there was a reply from the farther side of the swamp, and presently the children heard a rushing, crashing sound among the canes.

Sweetest Susan crept a little closer to Buster John, and Drusilla snuggled up to Sweetest Susan. The children were not frightened, but they were filled with unknown anticipations. They knew not what to expect next. The crashing noise in the canes seemed to come nearer, and then it suddenly stopped. If it was the White Pig, he was listening.

“Come, White Pig! Come, Grunter, come!” called Aaron. “Are you then afraid?”

The crashing sound in the canes was renewed more violently than ever, and in a moment the White Pig — the terror of the plantation — burst from the reeds with a grunt that was nearly a roar.

“I dunner what they call him a pig fer,” whispered Drusilla, “he big enough for two hogs.”

And this was true. The White Pig was not fat, but he was lean and tall. He was not a pretty pig by any means. There was a vicious twinkle in his eye. His body was nearly covered with mud, and one of his ears was gone, having been torn away by dogs when he was less able to defend himself than now.

"It is long since I've seen you, Son of Ben Ali. Humph! No wonder! What am I?"

Aaron was about to say something, but the quick, restless eye of the White Pig caught sight of the children, and, with a snort of mingled fear and rage, he plunged into the cane-brake again. He ran a little way, as the children could see by the shaking of the reeds, and then stopped to listen. He heard nothing but the loud laugh Aaron sent after him.

"Go, then!" cried Aaron. "Go and stay. In the light here your shadow will catch you. Go, then! The White Pig that used to roam these fields with me had neither the heart nor the feet of a fox."

Presently, when everything was quiet, the children could see by the shaking of the reeds, that the White Pig was coming out again. But this time he came no further than the edge of the swamp. Nothing could be seen except his head and shoulders, and these, with one ear gone, were not as pretty as a picture. His bristles stood up straight and stiff, from fear or anger, giving him a ragged appearance, and he opened and closed his mouth viciously.

"Humph! humph!" he said. "Who are these, Son of Ben Ali, and what trap have you set for me?"

"Some little children armed with broom straws," laughed Aaron. "Run, White Pig, run. They will catch you, sure!"

"Boof!" cried the White Pig contemptuously. "The Spotted Sow goes about with her children squealing behind her. When did the Son of Ben Ali take up that trade? Boof!"

"When the White Pig became afraid of his shadow," replied Aaron.

"Then why call me?" asked the White Pig.

Aaron shook his head slowly. "You are right," he replied. "Why should I call you at night, when I have a basket of new corn scattered for you?"

"Humph!" grunted the White Pig.

"I call you because I choose to. The children yonder have seen the sign; they have been touched. They know who we are and what we are. Two belong by blood to the Little Master. That is enough for me."

"Humph! Boof! Son of Ben Ali, it is also enough for me. Goof! I have seen them—

they have seen me — what more can I do? Why should I stay? The mud in the swamp is soft and cool, but here the sun shines hot.”

“If I had a bag of corn,” suggested Aaron.

“I say nothing, Son of Ben Ali. I see no corn, and the sun shines hot. What am I to do?”

“These who have been touched and who have seen the sign are here to speak with you. They came to hear you tell of the time when you and I lived in these fields together, sleeping and hiding in the daytime, and slipping about at night.”

The White Pig’s bristles no longer stood up.

“Humph!” he grunted. “I will go wallow in the branch and wash the mud off.”

“He gone ter wash his face and hands, an’ comb his hair,” whispered Drusilla. “I speck he gwine ter come buljin’ out’n dat swamp terreckly, an’ den what we gwine do? Ef he look hard at me, I ’m gwine ter fall right flat on de groun’ an’ holler loud ez I kin squall.”

“Well, if you do that,” said Buster John, “you ’ll scare him, and they say that when a wild hog is scared he gets mad.”

“I do’ know what I ’m gwine ter do,” remarked

Drusilla, after a pause, during which she seemed to be thinking. "But I tell you now, I feel mighty quare. Ef dey wuz any tree 'roun' here I'd climb it er break my neck tryin'. You-all is de outdoonest white chillun I ever hear tell un — comin' way out here from yo' pa an' ma des ter be ripped up an' kilt by a great big ol' wil' hog."

"You know the way back to the wagon," said Buster John. "Just go there and wait till we come. You make too much fuss anyhow."

"Go dar by myself!" exclaimed Drusilla. "No, sub! You don' know me! I would n't go 'cross dat hill dar by myse'f, not fer ham! Uh-uh! I know I ain't got much sense, but I got mo' sense dan dat. I would n't mo' dan git out er sight er you-all fo' dat ar White Pig would have me. He may be gwine ter ketch me anyhow, but ef he do I'll be right here where you-all kin see me. You done brung me, en ef I git kilt, you-all will be de'casion un it. Ef Marster an' Mistiss done come ter de pass whar dey want de niggers fed ter hogs, an' wil' hogs at dat, den I ain't got no complaints ter make."

But Buster John and Sweetest Susan were pay-

ing the smallest attention to Drusilla. They were watching Aaron, and waiting for the White Pig to make his appearance again. Finally Aaron turned away from the swamp and came to the children, and presently they heard the White Pig coming up behind them, grunting and "goofing," though not so fiercely as before.

Drusilla turned and saw him coming, and exclaimed: "Dar now! what I tell you. Ef I 'd a-started to'rds dat wagon, he 'd a got me sho ez de worl'. An' he may git me yit." She jumped up and ran towards Aaron for protection. But he shook her in a way to convince her that she would do well to keep quiet.

The White Pig had gone into the swamp, wallowed in the clean water of the branch, and had then come out and gone around half a mile to see that there was no ambushade. He seemed to be very well satisfied, for he grunted in a good-humored way as he trotted up.

"You did n't go far enough, White Pig," said Aaron, "I forgot you were growing old. My men are hid behind the wagon on the other hill. Next time I will bring them nearer — even to the edge of the swamp."

“Goof — goof!” replied the White Pig. “What would you have? I am alone. You are yonder. I am here. How do I know that the Son of Ben Ali remains the same? Humph! let me see for myself. Once you would go far to scratch my back till I fell asleep in the shade. Once you would shake down the scalybarks in the woods. Now you fling corn here and there and go your way. And sometimes many suns and moons come between the baskets of corn. Do I complain? Goof! I go into the cool swamp and tell the red squirrels that the Son of Ben Ali is sick, or away on a journey. And they say ‘Come,’ and we go into the woods beyond the swamp, and then the red squirrels shake down the scalybarks and the hickory nuts. Goof! goof!”

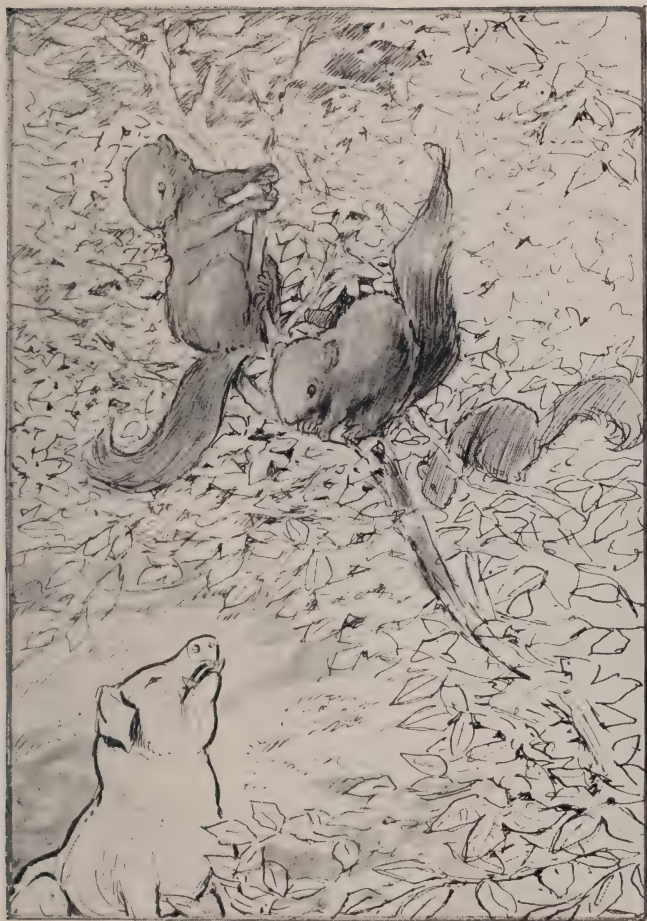
Aaron laid his hand on the White Pig’s back and passed it gently through the thick bristles.

“That is so,” said Aaron, “but you forget about the yams that are left buried in the field for you. You forget the goobers, the turnips, and the bank of sugar-cane. You forget the corn that is scattered here and there for you every day when the weather is cold.”

“Goof! Why should I think of them, Son of Ben Ali? Hot or cold, the long swamp is a feed trough for me. I need never come out of it. What is it to me if you come empty-handed, so you come? Do you think I have forgotten the long nights when I trotted through the woods with you? Or when I ran to the sound of your whistling? Or when I charged the hounds that were trailing you and drove them away? I was thinking only of the Son of Ben Ali. I am getting very old. My tusks are yellow, and one of them is broken. I can run, but not so swiftly as when I carried you the news of the great fire one night. No, my legs fail me.”

“You are old,” said Aaron. “Of all your kind, you are the oldest I have ever seen.”

“Goof — humph! Why not? All the rest are glad to run into the pen when they hear corn falling from the basket. They go in and eat and sleep until they are fat, and then some cold night you see the fires lit, and then, one after another you hear the fat fools in the pen squeal. Then in the morning you can see them hanging by their heels in a row. Goof! I have seen it. Hanging by their heels, their hair off, and their



GRUNTER ASKING THE RED SQUIRRELS FOR NUTS

throats cut. Oof! It makes me shiver. I saw it when I was running about with my mother, and though I have gone hungry many a night, never did I go through a gap in the fence that was left for me, and never did I follow the rest when they went to be fed in the pen."

All this time the White Pig, using his forefeet as pivots, turned his body first one way and then the other, watching every open space, and often pausing to listen. There was an air of wildness about him that kept the children quiet and subdued.

"These," said Aaron, "are my friends. They shall be yours, if you choose."

"Humph! What do they want with me?"

"We want to hear you tell about the time when Uncle Aaron was a runaway," suggested Buster John.

"Goof! Who is Uncle Aaron?" asked the White Pig.

"Me," said Aaron.

"Oof — oof!" cried the White Pig, scornfully. "Return to the swamp, Son of Ben Ali, where we have no such names. The paths are all there. I have kept them hard and firm. Come!"

Aaron shook his head. "It is too late," he said. "I belong yonder; you belong here."

"Then I'll go where I belong. Ooft!"

"When you have pleased my friends."

"To-morrow, Son of Ben Ali. Not now. They are too far from home. To-night, when the moon stands high, I'll come through the long lane that has been closed, and hide in the plum thicket that has been left in the peach orchard."

"So then," said Aaron, "we will go. Before long I'll come and have a race with you in the swamp."

"Oof — ooft!" grunted the White Pig. "You shall win if you can!"

Then Aaron and the children started back to where they had left the wagon. The White Pig trotted with them a quarter of a mile or more, and then paused and sniffed the air.

"Gooft! The sun is too bright here. As for me, I travel in the dark."

With that he turned and went galloping back into the swamp.

IX.

THE WHITE PIG'S STORY.

THE next day the children were ready to go to the plum thicket in the peach orchard as soon as they had their breakfast, but while they were talking about it a new trouble arose. It grew out of a question asked by Drusilla.

"Is Unk A'on gwine 'long wid us?" she inquired.

It was a natural and an innocent question, but it presented a difficulty. Sweetest Susan looked at Buster John for an answer, and Buster John looked at Sweetest Susan and Drusilla, but made no reply.

"Kaze ef he ain't," remarked Drusilla, pursuing the subject, "you'll des hatter count me out. I'll stan' off som'ers whar I kin run an' holler when dat ar wil' hog git mad an' rip you up, but when it comes ter gwine right whar he is when Unk A'on ain't wid us, I ain't gwine ter do it. So dar you got it, flat an' plain. I ain't gwine.

I watch his eye yistiddy, an' time I see it lookin' red on de eye-ball, I know'd dat ar hog was rank pizen when he git mad."

Finally Buster John said he would find Aaron, but Aaron was not to be found. He had gone off with the plow hands early in the morning, and wouldn't be back before night. Thereupon Buster John declared that he was going to the plum thicket, if he had to go by himself.

"I'm most afraid," said Sweetest Susan.

"I'm wuss'n dat," exclaimed Drusilla. "I'm skeered des dry so."

"Then both of you stay where you are," cried Buster John. He started off very boldly, but not without some misgivings. Looking back without pretending to do so, he saw Sweetest Susan coming, though very slowly, while Drusilla was dragging along and bringing up the rear, quarreling, and begging Sweetest Susan to turn back. Buster John stopped and told his sister to come on, and waited for her.

"I'll go whar I kin see how dat wil' hog do when he eats folks, but hosses can't drag me in dat ar plum thicket whar he hidin'," remarked Drusilla.

Sweetest Susan was not much afraid, seeing Buster John so bold, and Buster John was made bolder by the fact that his sister seemed willing to go. So they went, Drusilla bringing up the rear and protesting.

The plum thicket grew on each side of a gully that had washed in the lower part of the orchard. The plum trees were small and grew very close together, and the gully was filled with a season's growth of weeds that had not been uprooted by the rains. So that, taken altogether, the plum thicket was a very convenient hiding-place for the White Pig, or for any other creature not larger than a horse.

The children approached it cautiously, and hesitated about entering. While they were halting and considering what to do, they heard a grunt from the middle of the thicket — a grunt as friendly and as familiar as if it came from a fat hog in a pen. Reassured by this, Buster John went into the thicket, followed by Sweetest Susan. They went in cautiously and looked about them very cautiously, but they could see nothing.

“Ooft — gooft!” grunted the White Pig in a contented manner. “Where am I? Can’t you find me?”

They looked about them with all the eyes they had, but failed to find him. Their search became so interesting that Sweetest Susan laughed. There was nothing to laugh at, but she was so thrilled by the excitement of trying to find the White Pig—and he was not a small pig by any means—that she had to express her feelings in some way, and so she laughed.

At that moment Drusilla came to the edge of the thicket. Hearing Sweetest Susan laugh, she grew bold enough to venture in.

“What you-all doin,’ I like ter know?” she asked in a somewhat dubious tone.

“Oh, come and help us, Drusilla!” cried Sweetest Susan, as gleefully as if she were playing hide-the-switch, or kick-the-can. “We are trying to find him. He’s hiding in here, and we can’t find him. Come on!”

Drusilla joined the others, but not with any degree of enthusiasm. “You-all want ter fin’ ’im lots wuss’n I does. I’m mo’ fear’d er fin’in’ ’im dan I is er not fin’in’ ’im.”

“Let’s go across the gully,” said Buster John. He ran down the bank, through the thick weeds, and out on the other side, followed by Sweetest



THE WHITE PIG TELLS HIS STORY

Susan. Drusilla would have followed, too, but just as she had reached the bottom of the gully and started through the weeds, the White Pig rose by her side with a loud grunt. Drusilla was so terrified that she sank in the weeds, unable to utter a sound. Sweetest Susan screamed and Buster John was so taken by surprise and so confused, that for an instant he was undecided whether to take to his heels, dragging his sister after him, or whether to stand his ground.

“Gooft — ooft!” grunted the White Pig. “What is the matter here?”

With this he walked out of the gully, went past Buster John and Drusilla, and lay down where the shade was thickest. Drusilla recovered almost immediately, and, as sometimes happens with older and more enlightened people, anger took the place of fear. To the surprise of her companions, she came out of the gully, walked straight to the White Pig, and sat down by him, so close that she might have touched him with her hand without unbending her arm.

“Humph!” grunted the White Pig, in a friendly way. “That is better. The Son of Ben Ali brought some roasting ears before the sun

came out. They were very fine — sweet and juicy. Goof!

The White Pig smacked his mouth and blinked his eyes as if to show how he had enjoyed the feast. Buster John and Sweetest Susan seated themselves near Drusilla.

“The first time I saw the Son of Ben Ali,” said the White Pig, “I was just big enough to hide in the grass and run about without squealing for my mammy. I used to slip out of the swamp and run into the woods after the acorns. The red squirrel was my friend then, and his great-grandchildren are my friends now. He used to climb the big turkey oak, and run about on the limbs pretending to be playing, but all the time he would be shaking down the sweet little acorns. He barked at me and I grunted at him, and we used to have a very nice time all by ourselves.

“One day, while I was out in the open woods cracking acorns, I heard some one call, ‘Run here little Pig! run quick!’ I did n’t have any better sense than to do as I was told, so I ran as hard as I could toward the call. Then I heard a zooning sound in the air, a loud squall, and a noise as of a tree falling. I ran right into the hands of a big man. I was terribly frightened, and I suppose

I must have squealed as loud as I could. The big man was the Son of Ben Ali, and he hushed me up by telling me that he called me because a wildcat had been watching me from the lowest limb of the turkey oak.

“Humph — ooft!” grunted the White Pig, “the only reason he didn’t get me was because the Son of Ben Ali struck him with a stone just as he started to jump. The wildcat fell out of the tree dead. His skull was shattered. You have never seen the Son of Ben Ali throw a stone? Well that is between you and him. I have seen him.

“He killed the wildcat that my mammy had often told me about, and after that I came to know the Son of Ben Ali well. Whenever I could find him, night or day, I trotted around with him, and that is how it happened that when my brothers and sisters were shot by men and caught by dogs I was not with them to be shot or caught. I was trotting about with the Son of Ben Ali.

“It was the same thing day after day and night after night, the Son of Ben Ali coming and going, and I trotting at his heels or running in the bushes close by. One day, when the sun had gone down,

we were slipping along behind the orchard here. The Son of Ben Ali said he was going to see the Little Master, and I was to wait for him. I heard a dog bark, and this made me stop. And then, while I was listening, a man came upon us — a white man. He seemed to rise out of a dark place in the road. I dodged into a fence corner before he saw me, and stood there, listening.

“‘Who are you?’ said the Son of Ben Ali. His voice shook a little.

“‘That’s what the owl said,’ answered the white man. This tickled me so that I grunted before I knew it. The white man laughed, too, and said he was the Teacher of the young people at the big house. Gooft! a Teacher! There was once a schoolhouse — they called it that, but it was nothing in the world but a log cabin — in the woods over yonder. Every day the Teacher would come and pound and pummel the boys, and every day the boys would go out and stone the cows and hogs. They killed a blood cousin of mine.

“So I said to myself, Gooft! if this Teacher is teaching the Little Master to do these things, I will keep out of the Little Master’s way.



A WILD CAT WAS WATCHING ME

"Humph! The Son of Ben Ali said to this Teacher: 'You ought to know me. You saw me in the speculator's train, and you saw me sold from the block.'

"The Teacher placed his hand on the Son of Ben Ali's shoulder and replied: 'I came from far away, and there the people are thinking about you and praying for you. Bear that in mind — thinking about you, and praying for you every day and every night. Hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands — all thinking about you and praying for you.'

"Gooft — ooft! This Teacher talked as the man talks in the little house on the creek road where the people go when the bell rings — the little house with the high wooden chimney, where the bell is."

"It is a church," said Buster John.

"Humph! It may be a church for all I know. I have stood in the woods and heard the man talk to the people, and the Teacher talked just like him. I don't know what else the Teacher said to the Son of Ben Ali, nor what the Son of Ben Ali said to him, but that night, after the Son of Ben Ali had seen the Little Master, and when we were

on our way back to the woods, we met the Teacher again. He had been to another plantation, and told the negroes there how the people in his country were thinking about them and praying for them.

“ ‘You go too far from home,’ said the Son of Ben Ali. ‘Many a negro where you’ve been to-night will tell what you have said, in hopes of getting an extra rasher of meat.’

“Ooft — gooft!” grunted the White Pig; “and hog meat at that. But the Teacher said that he would trust them.

“ ‘The best good-night I can give you,’ said the Son of Ben Ali, ‘is not to trust them too much or too far.’

“Ooft — oof! Now you might wonder how I could remember such little things. But little things have a way of growing, and this was one of the little things that grew. Humph! It grew like a pumpkin vine. One thing followed another like sheep jumping over a rail on the ground. The last sheep to go over jumps higher than a man’s head. So with these things I am telling you of. They grew, and they jumped.

“When we met the Teacher, the grass was

green, but it was not long before the winds began to blow keen and cold, and then the grass shriveled and the leaves on the trees began to fall. As for me, I could lie in the sedge and keep warm, or I could make me a bed of leaves on the windward side of the fence and never know that the weather was cold. With the Son of Ben Ali, it was different. Not having been born free to the woods and the weather — to the four winds and the four seasons — humph! — he must have a fire. He must have a fire that could be felt and not be seen. So he dug him a hole in the ground, a trench he called it, and in this he made his fire, and he seemed to be very fond of it when the weather was damp and cold.

“One night when I was returning from the yam patch to the top of the hill, I heard horses going along the road. I knew the horses had riders, for I could hear no wheels. The fog was heavy and thick, and so I went close to the road to see and hear what I could. I slipped through the wet grass and listened. Suddenly one of the riders pulled up his horse and cried out:—

“‘Look! look on the hill yonder!’

“I turned to see what it was, and it was terrible

enough to scare anybody. On the clouds above the hill was the shadow of a man as big as a fodder stack, and as high as the tallest pine. Even the horses saw it and snorted with fear. The shadow raised its arms above its head and then let them drop quickly. I knew at once that it was the shadow of the Son of Ben Ali, but even then I had a quaking fear. Suddenly I heard another voice call out: —

“ ‘Whoever you are, come and help a man in trouble.’

“The Son of Ben Ali heard it, too, for the cry of the man for help had hardly died away before the shadow on the clouds disappeared as if it had been wiped out. I knew that the voice that had called to the shadow was the voice of the Teacher, the man who had told the Son of Ben Ali that thousands and tens of thousands were praying for him. And I wondered whether the thousands and the tens of thousands were praying for the Teacher, now that he seemed to be in trouble.

“The Teacher called again, and then I heard the voice of old Grizzly’s son George tell the man to hush or he would blow his brains out.

“ ‘But I have done nothing to you, gentlemen,’



LOOK ON THE HILL YONDER

said the Teacher. 'I have not harmed you in the least. What have you seized me for, and where are you taking me?'

" 'Hush, you sniveling wretch!' said old Grizzly's son George. 'You've been colloquing with the niggers, and telling them about freedom. You want to raise an insurrection, and you'll have to pay for it!'

"After that the Teacher said no more, and the patrol rode on. I could see, dark as it was, that they had the Teacher riding behind Old Grizzly's son George. The Teacher was tied with a rope, and the rope was fastened to Old Grizzly's son. All this I saw, and I saw guns — gooft — the things that burn and sting you from afar. It was well that my eyes were fitted for the dark, otherwise the Son of Ben Ali would have been riddled. But I ran and met him, and told him of the guns. He wanted to slip among the horses, cut the ropes that bound the Teacher, and carry him out of hearing among the bushes. But there were the guns!

"Then the Son of Ben Ali wanted me to run ahead, get in the road and rush out at the horses when they came up, while he cut the ropes from

the Teacher. Gooft! But there were the guns! We heard the men talking, and found that they were going to take the Teacher to a cross-roads store, called Harmony, seven miles away, and there hang him."

Sweetest Susan shuddered. Drusilla cried, "Well, suh!" Buster John pulled up a big bunch of grass and threw it away from him. His face was red with anger or excitement.

"Humph! Hang him to a limb!" grunted the White Pig. "Ooft! There was a bridge a quarter of a mile ahead. It was long and narrow and low — just wide enough for a wagon and not higher from the shallow creek than a man's head. Over this bridge the men had to go, and the Son of Ben Ali wanted me to run ahead, get on the further end of the bridge, charge the horses when they reached the middle, and then jump off and get under the bridge before the men could make their guns talk. It was not to my taste. If I had had to choose between charging the horses on that bridge and a mess of ripe persimmons — humph — I think I would have taken a few of the persimmons. But what could I do? Gooft! The Son of Ben Ali had his mind made up.

"So I ran ahead, jumped over a low place in the fence, and reached the bridge before the horses did. I heard them come on the other end of the bridge, and I tried to get my bristles up, but — gooft — ooft — they would n't stay up. As the men came across I went to meet them, and when they came within a few steps of me, I charged at them, making as much noise as I could, crying :

" 'Gooft — ooft ! Gooft ! ' "

"It was all so sudden that the horses were terribly frightened. There were five of them. One reared and I ran under his forelegs. Another shied too far to one side, and went crashing through the railing into the creek. One of the horses kicked me, and — gooft ! — that made me mad. For the first time my bristles rose. I rushed at them with open mouth. Another crashed through the railing and went over. All this time I could see the Son of Ben Ali at the heels of the horse that was carrying the Teacher and old Grizzly's son.

"But the horse was scared nearly to death. His rider could n't manage him. He was wild. Before the Son of Ben Ali could cut the rope, the scared horse had whirled and rushed off the

bridge, and I went after him. The Son of Ben Ali disappeared, and I went over the fence and rested in the bushes. Presently the Son of Ben Ali came creeping to where I was. He was wet with sweat and trembling all over.

“Neither the men nor the horses were hurt. Gooft! they came together and sat on their horses within a few steps of where we lay. One said it was a man seven feet high. Another said it was a wild varment as big as a lion. Still another said it was Satan. Gooft — ooft! The Teacher said it was a warning. Ooft! ‘The hand of the Lord is in it,’ he said.

“‘It will be a hard race, little Grunter — a hard race! It is three miles to the big house, and from there eight miles to Harmony. It is to be a hard race, little Grunter — a hard race. But it must be run.’ So said the Son of Ben Ali.

“‘Am I to go, Son of Ben Ali?’ I said.

“‘As far as you may and as fast as you can, little Grunter.’

“Gooft! you have never seen the Son of Ben Ali throw a stone, and you have never seen him run! We got in the big road where the ground

was firm. Gooft! I began to gallop, but I heard the Son of Ben Ali right at my heels. I began to run, and — gooft — ooft! — I heard him closer at my heels. The faster I went, the faster the Son of Ben Ali went. I was a pretty swift runner and am to this day, but that night I could never get more than twenty steps away from the Son of Ben Ali. Gooft! he was running to save life, and I was running for fun. Once we passed a stray traveler — a stray negro. He called out: 'What are you trying to do, brother?' Ooft! — and the Son of Ben Ali called back: 'Trying to catch little Grunter, brother!' Gooft — and the stranger cried: 'I wish you mighty well, my brother!'

"Gooft — ooft! It was a warm race and a long one. We were not going as fast at the end as we were at the beginning. Ooft! but we were going. And we went till we came to the horse lot, and then I stopped. I spoke to the Son of Ben Ali and said that we were now as close to the hogpen as I hoped ever to be, and so he cried out as he ran: 'Good night, little Grunter!' I heard him go to the stable where the Black Stallion, the Son of Abdallah, is kept. Then I heard

the door thrown open, and the Son of Abdallah came out with a scream and a snort, and that is all I know. The rest the Black Stallion can tell you.

“Ooft — gooft! That is all. Say nothing to no one. I’ll sleep here a little, and when the sun gets lower I’ll slip away to the swamp.”

“We are very much obliged to you,” said Sweetest Susan.

“Humph — umph! Humph — umph!” grunted the White Pig. “Nicely said — nicely said! I’m over-paid.”

X.

THE BLACK STALLION'S STORY.

THE children were anxious to hear the rest of the story at once, but they were compelled to wait. The White Pig had told all he knew, and Aaron was on the other side of the plantation. So Buster John and Sweetest Susan amused themselves by wondering whether the Teacher was hanged or whether he was rescued. As for Drusilla, she very plainly said that she did n't much care. It was all past and gone anyhow. Break a pumpkin, she said, and nobody in the world can mend it, not even if people were to come and cry over it.

But Buster John and Sweetest Susan thought it made all the difference whether a man was hanged or saved. They talked about it a good deal, and when they went to the house they asked their grandfather the name of the man who had come from a far country to teach their Uncle Crotchett. The old gentleman leaned back in

his chair and looked at the youngsters. He smiled a little, and then closed his eyes and seemed to be thinking. The question had carried him back to the past.

"Have you forgotten his name, Grandfather?" asked Sweetest Susan, after a while.

"Forgotten his name!" exclaimed the grandfather. "Oh, no! No, indeed! His name was Hudspeth — Richard Hudspeth. I remember him as well as if he had been here only yesterday. At bottom, he was a fine character. He came here from Massachusetts, and he went back there."

The grandfather paused and drummed gently on the arms of his easy chair. Then —

"Yes; he went back there. He is a big man now. He was elected to Congress some time ago. We have had some correspondence. He is a very able man. I wonder if he remembers his adventures here?"

"He is a bitter abolitionist," said the children's father.

"He was always that," said the grandfather. "But I shall always love him on account of Little Crotchett. The two were devoted to each other."

"Grandfather," said Sweetest Susan, after a while, "what is a bitter abolitionist? Is n't that what papa said?" she asked, seeing her grandfather laugh.

"My darling child, you would n't know now if I were to tell you. Run along with Drusilla. I'll think it over, and tell you about it some other time."

Sweetest Susan and Drusilla joined Buster John in the yard, and there they discussed the matter, without coming to any conclusion. Buster John knew that the abolitionists wanted to free the negro slaves, but that was all.

That night they went to Aaron's house and asked him whether the Teacher had been hanged or rescued, but Aaron said he was too tired to sit up and talk. He said he would be around the lot all day the next day, and then they could go and see Timoleon, who could tell all about it. This satisfied the children, and they went to bed happy in the expectation of visiting the Black Stallion.

The children were up bright and early the next morning, which was something unusual, for they were very fond of sleeping late. As soon as Drusilla had eaten her breakfast — she waited on

the children, at the table, and was allowed to eat as soon as they had finished—all three went hunting for Aaron. They found him right where they wanted to find him, in the lot where Timoleon's stable stood. So they went to him, and he lost no time in opening the door of the stable.

The Black Stallion did not have fresh air and exercise every day, and so he sprung through the open door and went galloping madly about the field, sending forth a screaming challenge to the whole plantation. He galloped about the field as far as the limits of the high fence would permit, and paid no attention to either Aaron or the children.

"He has forgotten us," said Sweetest Susan in some alarm.

Aaron laughed. "Folks forget," said he, "but my brothers that run on four legs never forget."

When the Black Stallion had taken his exercise, he walked slowly back to the stable, sometimes pausing to crop the grass or to hold his head high in the air.

"Grandson of Abdallah," said Aaron, "you have forgotten your friends."

"I am the forgotten one, Son of Ben Ali,"

replied Timoleon, "my feed is chucked into the trough, the door is shut, and I am left to chew my cud. Am I a cow, that I should be chewing my cud? Am I a hog, that I should be fastened in a pen?"

"Whose fault, Grandson of Abdallah? You will have no one to feed you but me, and I—well, what I have to do I must do. The grandchildren of the White-Haired Master are here."

"I thought they had forgotten me, Son of Ben Ali. I am glad they are here. But what of it? I go in my pen, and the door is closed; what matters it to me whether they are here or yonder?"

"No, Grandson of Abdallah. In the pasture here the morning sun shines, the grass is green, the air is cool. Here for a little while you may stay with these grandchildren of the White-haired Master. Your stable is to be cleaned."

For answer, the Black Stallion sought out a soft place in the grass, held his head close to the ground, walked in a small circle that constantly grew smaller until his knees bent under him, and then he keeled over on his side and began to wallow. This finished, he rose and began to

graze close to the children, apparently as gentle as any horse could be.

“Do you remember the night the White-haired Master rode you to Harmony?” asked Aaron from inside the stable.

The Grandson of Abdallah raised his head and went to the stable door, his mouth half full of grass. Some of the grass must have tickled his nose, for he snorted twice in quick succession.

“Do I remember it, Son of Ben Ali? How could I forget it? It was a little while before the big race at Lexington. That was the night I learned how to put my nose at a horse’s flank and run the breath out of him.”

“The children of the White-haired Master would like to hear of that,” said Aaron.

“It was at night,” remarked the Black Stallion, threshing at a perverse fly with his tail. “What time, I know not, but I had been dozing, and just before that I had heard the chickens crow. There was no moon. The big white star was glittering where the sun rises, and there was frost in the air. Suddenly I heard some one tugging at my stable door and the voice of the Son of Ben Ali calling.

"The door was barred, but he broke the bar. The stable was dark, but he found the bridle, blanket, and saddle. He cried:—

"‘Steady, Son of Abdallah! There is work for us this night!’

"I bit at him in play, and took a piece of his coat off, but he made no pause until saddle and bridle were on. Then he ran through the door, crying ‘Come, Son of Abdallah! Come! There is work for us to-night! Steady! You will have play enough before the night is over.’

"I liked nothing better than that, so I sprang through the door, and went galloping after the Son of Ben Ali. He ran to the house, and there I saw the Gray Mare, my sister, standing. She was bridled, but the saddle was missing.

"‘Stand here!’ said the Son of Ben Ali. He placed his hand on the yard fence and sprang over, though the gate was near. He ran to the big tree near the corner of the house, and began to walk upward. This was new to me, so I started back in some surprise. But the Son of Ben Ali called to me to be quiet, and in a minute he had disappeared in the little window that juts from the roof.

"Then I heard the voice of the Little Master crying 'Take me down stairs!'

"In a little while the Son of Ben Ali came down the tree and stood at the door, which was presently opened by the White-haired Master. His speech was short and quick : —

" 'Where are the horses?'

" 'Here, Master,' said the Son of Ben Ali, who came running toward me. 'Mount here, Master.'

" 'Show me the way!' said the White-haired Master.

"The Son of Ben Ali flung himself on the Gray Mare, my sister. The gates were all open, and we went through them in a hurry. I felt the White-haired Master settle himself in the saddle and try the stirrups. Then his knees pressed a little closer to the saddle, and I thought, 'Here is a rider — a little heavy, but more helpful than a lighter man who has never learned to fit himself to the curve of the saddle, and to move as the horse moves.' He reached his right arm forward to feel of the play of my shoulders, and gave me a gentle pat by way of praise.

"The Gray Mare, my sister, was trained for racing, while I was raw and untried, waiting for

my turn, that came afterward, and she tripped along ahead of me as lightly as a rabbit that has just been frightened from its bed.

"We cleared the gates and the narrow lane, and presently struck into the big road.

"'Are we going to Harmony?' asked the White-haired Master.

"'Yes, Master.'

"'We shall have to ride, then.'

"At that the Gray Mare, my sister, seemed to glide away from me. The Son of Ben Ali had slapped her with his open hand. I went after her with a little rush that never moved the White-haired Master in his saddle. I felt my blood tingling. Whatever the Gray Mare, my sister, was doing, I knew I was going at only half speed, and I longed to show the White-haired Master what I could do.

"I said as we galloped, 'My sister, this night you will see which of us has the swiftest feet.' The answer she made was a loud snort, and again she tried to glide away, but I kept my muzzle at the Son of Ben Ali's knee.

"'Not now,' said the Son of Ben Ali. 'Wait! Wait till we cross the bridge.'

“ ‘Are we riding or playing?’ asked the White-haired Master. ‘Man, we’ll be too late!’

“ ‘When we cross the bridge, we’ll go, Master,’ said the Son of Ben Ali.

“Yet the ground was firm and springy, and the road level. I was so fretted that I bit at the Son of Ben Ali’s leg. ‘You won’t play when you come to your journey’s end, Grandson of Abdallah,’ he said. I knew then that we would go fast enough after awhile, and so I fell back a little and settled down to a swift, steady gallop. My easy movements must have pleased the White-haired Master, for he reached forward and gave me a love-lick, saying, ‘Good horse!’

“So in a little while we came to the bridge, a small affair, but rickety. On the other side the Son of Ben Ali leaned forward a little, saying, ‘Now, Master!’ The Gray Mare, my sister, leaped away from me with a snort. I threw my head forward as the White-haired Master gave me the length of the rein, and the Gray Mare, my sister, soon found that she would not have the road to herself.

“Within a quarter of a mile, I was running with my nose at her flank, and I kept it there.



THE GRAY MARE LEAPED AWAY FROM ME

I could have run past her, but I knew the White-haired Master would give the word for that, and so I kept my place. Yet, I could feel that the Gray Mare, my sister, was trying her best to get away from me.

“The sound of our feet on the hard road must have made a terrible clatter. I could hear it flung back at us from the woods on either side. Once, as we were passing a house by the roadside, a pack of curs came trooping out at us. This was my chance. The Gray Mare, my sister, shied, while I ran right through the pack, knocking them right and left. The White-haired Master touched me again, saying, ‘Good horse!’ and shook the reins just a little, but it was enough. Before the dog I had crippled could yelp twice, I had taken the road away from the Gray Mare, my sister. I could hear her coming behind me. I could hear the Son of Ben Ali slap her first with his open hand, and then with the slack of the bridle rein.

“But it did no good. I loved to listen to the clatter of my feet on the hard clay in the road. I was proud to feel that I was not running at full speed. I was proud to know that the White-haired

Master had grown young again, and to feel him holding the reins just steady enough to catch me should I chance to stumble. I was proud to feel him sitting in the saddle, balancing himself to all my movements so as not to worry me with his weight.

“Suddenly I felt him turn in the saddle and look back. Then his firm hand checked me, and I knew that the Gray Mare, my sister, had been more than matched. As I settled down into a steadier gallop the White-haired Master said : —

“ ‘ Another racehorse here, boy — the greatest of all.’

“ ‘ Yes, Master,’ replied the Son of Ben Ali, ‘ he is the grandson of Abdallah.’

“ It was well that the White-haired Master drew rein when he did, for we still had two miles to go, and the Gray Mare, my sister, was beginning to blow a little. But we rested ourselves by going easily. Presently I saw firelight shining through the trees half a mile ahead.

“ ‘ That’s the place !’ cried the White-haired Master.

“ He leaned forward in the saddle, and I took that for a signal to go. It was a level road, and

I stretched myself out for a run that would please and surprise the White-haired Master. As I ran I wondered what the people at the fire would think as they heard us thundering down the road.

“Nobody knows to this day what they thought. We were upon them before they could gather their wits about them. We were upon them before they could get out of the way. The torches glimmering through the trees blinded the eyes of the White-haired Master, so that he drew rein a little too late to stop me near the group of men standing there. One of them, the son of the man called Old Grizzly, tried to dodge out of the way, but as he dodged I swerved to one side, and so struck him fairly on the shoulder. He went down as if a tree had fallen on him. As I turned again I caught the arm of one of them in my teeth, and carried him with me, screaming like a woman. From that day to this I have been called the Man-eater; but as to eating a man — Blibbelibbel — it makes me sick to think of it!

“I was still jumping, but trying to come to a halt, when the White-haired Master drove his heels at me, and whirled me around on my hind feet as on a pivot. As I turned I saw why. The

man called the Teacher had been sitting on a horse, his arms tied, and a rope around his neck, one end fastened to the limb of a tree. As we came up, some of the men had given the horse a cut with a hickory, and he had jumped away, leaving the Teacher swinging by the neck.

“With one stroke of a knife he carried, the White-haired Master cut the rope, and then he leaped nimbly from my back and lifted the man called the Teacher to his feet, cutting the rope from his arms and from his neck.

“The man called the Teacher was neither much hurt nor frightened, but he was weak. So he leaned against me as I stood panting for breath. There the White-haired Master left him and turned his attention to the men who were standing around. He called them murderers and assassins and cowards, but they made little or no reply. The Son of Old Grizzly, who was rubbing his shoulder, made some kind of excuse. He said he thought anybody had a right to hang anybody else who was trying to make the negroes rise and kill their masters.

“But the man called the Teacher hit the saddle he was leaning against so hard with his fist that



THE WHITE-HAIRED MASTER CUT THE ROPE

it made me jump, and said it was a lie. He declared that he had told the negroes to be patient, that thousands of good people were praying for them, and that the time would come when they would be free.

“ ‘What do I care what he told the negroes?’ cried the White-haired Master, turning upon the men. ‘Don’t you know, you cowardly wretches, that I will protect whoever lives under my roof with my life? Take yourselves off, and be glad that you have escaped so lightly. I know all of you, and I’ll have an eye on you hereafter.’ So said the White-haired Master; and the men, making what excuses they could think of, slunk away to where they had left their horses tied.

“Seeing the Gray Mare, my sister, standing near, I looked around for the Son of Ben Ali, but he was nowhere to be seen. I knew he was not far off. He was waiting till the men should get out of sight. Then he came forth from the bushes, and in the dark, lifted the man called the Teacher to the back of the Gray Mare, my sister.

“And so we went back home, going slowly, the man called the Teacher riding the Gray Mare,

my sister, and the Son of Ben Ali walking alongside to hold him in place should his strength fail.

"That is all. I saw no more of the Son of Ben Ali until after the big fire."

"When the house was burned?" asked Buster John.

"The big house—yes," replied the Black Stallion.

"That was the time you broke down your stable door," suggested Aaron, who was working away inside the stable.

"And came near catching the son of Old Grizzly, as he went over the fence," said the Black Stallion.

"Mr. George Gossett?" exclaimed Buster John.
"Why, he's an old man."

"He's older than he's good," remarked Aaron.

"I heard a great noise," said the Black Stallion — "the cows asking the mules what the trouble was, the mules asking the horses, and the geese screaming and flying about — and so I broke down my stable door. Just then I saw some one running through the field away from the house, and I tried to catch him. He was too

near the fence, but I saw it was the son of Old Grizzly."

"Why was he running through the field?" inquired Buster John.

"Well," said Aaron, "there was a fire burning the house, and there was this George Gossett running away. You can put the two together, if you want to, or you can leave them just as the Grandson of Abdallah saw them — one burning the house and the other running away."

"Huh! he sot dat house afire!" exclaimed Drusilla; "kaze I hear my mammy an' ol' Aunt Free Polly sesso."

All this made Sweetest Susan open her eyes in amazement, and they were very bright and beautiful eyes.

"Oh, how could he be so cruel?" she cried.

"He thought the White-haired Master rode him down that night on purpose," said Aaron, "and he had a good many other thoughts."

The Black Stallion galloped to another part of the field, and Aaron said it was time for the children to go to the house and fix for dinner. So they went running along.

XI.

FREE POLLY'S STORY.

It was not long before the children had an appointment to see Free Polly. She had chosen their father for her guardian, and was in the habit of visiting the plantation very often, sometimes staying there for weeks at a time.

Free Polly was sixty years old, but very frisky and fond of fun — always ready to listen to a joke or tell a story. All her stories were older than she was, but she never told one without laughing at it just as heartily as if she had heard it for the first time. She bowed her head from side to side in jaunty fashion, and laughed loudly. The children laughed, too, for she made a very comical appearance. She had on a yellow basque with flowing sleeves, and a blue skirt. On her head she wore a flaming red bandana, and on top of that a bonnet shaped like a sugar scoop and stuffed full of faded artificial flowers. At sixty years old Free Polly still considered herself a

belle, and put on a great many airs. Whenever she met anybody, black or white, she always bowed her head, first to the left, then to the right, and made a low curtsy. This she did now when the children called her. She bowed and curtsied, and then placed her arms akimbo, and waited for the youngsters to come up.

"Oh, I so glad to see you," she cried, "I can't tell you how glad I is. You mos' done grown. 'Fo' I know it you 'll be done grown an' married. Hey-hey! You nee'n ter laugh. I done see young people 'fo' I see you. Dey mos' all do dat away."

"Aunt Polly," said Buster John, "do you remember the night the big house burned?"

Free Polly ceased laughing and screwed up her mouth and face in pretended indignation.

"How I gwine ter fergit it? Wa'n't I right dar in de house? Right un' de roofness?"

"Won't you please tell us about it?" asked Sweetest Susan, with her pretty, coaxing smile.

Free Polly shook her head solemnly, closed her eyes, and heaved a deep sigh.

"How kin I tell you stan'in' up here flat-footed in de sun? Wait. I comin' in de house atter

supper to see Mistiss. When you see me in dar, run an' ax me to come in yo' room 'fo' I go. But when I go in dar I mus' fin' sump'n else 'sides a cheer, an' a table, an' a bedstid, an' a washstan'."

"What do you want to find?" Buster John inquired.

Again Free Polly closed her eyes and sighed, as she answered: —

"What I want to fin'? Biscuit. Battercakes. Butter. Ham." At each word Free Polly smacked her lips and opened her mouth wide. The children laughed, and promised that they would carry as much food into the nursery as they could make an excuse for.

At supper their mother saw them buttering more biscuits than they usually ate. So she suddenly asked: —

"Has any one seen Free Polly to-day?"

"Yes'm," promptly replied Drusilla, who was waiting on Buster John and Sweetest Susan.

"Is she coming here to-night?"

"I — I speck so," Drusilla answered somewhat doubtfully.

At this the mother looked at the children and laughed.

"Mamma, how did you know?" cried Sweetest Susan.

"Because she used to come to see me when I was a little girl, and I always had to carry biscuits and ham to my room, if I wanted her to tell me a tale. Drusilla, put those biscuits and three slices of ham on a plate, and carry it to the nursery."

Naturally the children were delighted at the way their mother fell into their innocent little plans, and they waited with a good deal of impatience for Free Polly to come. She came after what seemed to be a very long while. She was even more comically polite in the house than she was out of doors, and pretended to have a good deal to say to the "Mistiss;" but the lady said she was busy at that moment, and told Free Polly to go into the nursery and see the children.

Thus it came about that Buster John and Sweetest Susan heard all the particulars of the burning of the big house, told in a style that was to them the most graphic and complete that could be imagined.

After eating the supper that had been brought in for her, Free Polly wiped her mouth with the back of her hands, placed her heels on the top

round of the chair she sat in, and clasped her knees with her long arms. Then closing her eyes, she began :

“ I dunner how come it, but when de sun shine it look like a long time ago when de house burn. When night come, it look like it done happen yistiddy. It so come 'bout dat I hatter come see ol' Marster dat ve'y night. I start from de place whar I been workin' time de sun go down, an' when I come to turn in de big gate up yander, twuz gittin dark. I raise de latch er de big gate, I did, an' den I say ter myse'f, ' No, I won't go de front way, kaze dey might be comp'ny in de front peazzer, an' I 'll go roun' de back way an' come in by de nigger quarter.' I had my min' on dat ar man what dey like ter hang — dat ar Mr. Hudspy ”—

“ Hudspeth,” said Buster John.

“ Kaze he gimme a sev'm-punce one time, an' I wuz mighty sorry he had to go back home. I walk 'long, I did, an' I 'low I mighty sorry dat ar Mr. Hudspy ain't here now, kaze he might fergit hissif an' gimme a n'er sev'm-punce.' Des 'bout dat time I look up an' look 'round, an' right at me wuz a man. I could 'a' put out my han' an' totech

him. Ef he 'd 'a' said 'Boo!' at me, I 'd 'a' drapt right in my tracks. But I bowed, I did, an' drapt him a curtsy, an' ax'd him howdy.

"He say, 'Ain't dat Free Polly?' I say, 'Yasser.' I know'd time he open his mouth dat 't'wan't nobody in de roun' worl' but dat ar George Gossett.

"He say, 'I got a crow to pick wid you.' I say, 'How come dat, suh?'

"He say, 'You been harborin' runaway niggers.' I say, 'I don't see how I kin do dat, suh, when it's e'enabout all I kin do fer ter harbor myse'f, let 'lone runaway niggers.'

"He say, 'I hear tell you es des han' in glove wid dat ar nigger A'on what Pap bought fum de speculator.' I say, 'Ef A'on ever is been at my house, suh, it wuz unbeknownst to me.'

"He say, 'Nummine. I'll git you yit; an' when I does, hit'll be all night Isom dar wid you.' I say, 'Yasser,' and den I bowed perlite ez I know how, an' come on to de big house.

"I ain't been here long, 'fo' dey tell me dat de Little Marster — which dey call him Little Crotchet — is sorter ailin', an' I say ter myse'f dat I'll go up sta'rs dar whar he stay at, an' see him.

So, atter while, up I goes, an' sho' nuff, dar wuz de Little Marster layin' up dar readin'.

"He put down his book, he did, an' look like he mighty glad ter see me, an' he ax me what good fer deze here long-time pains in de legs; an' I say I dunno, 'cep'n you have somebody to rub 'em. He ax me ef I won't rub 'em; an' I say tooby-shore I will, an' glad to do it, an' den I whirled in an' rub 'em; an' whiles I'm a-rubbin' he ax me de names er all de presidencies er de Nunitin' States whar we live at, an' I say ef I ever know'd 'em I done fergitted 'em off'en my min'. Desso.

"An' den, bless yo' souls, he lay dar flat er his back, an' call off de names er all de presidencies er de Nunitin' States same ez ef he had 'em right dar in a book, an' den when he done dat he tol' me all 'bout John Henry Bonaparte an' Mr. Benjamin Arnold, which he traded off his country fer a pa'r er shiny boots an' a cocked hat."

Buster John and Sweetest Susan laughed heartily at this, and Free Polly laughed in sympathy.

"Yes, honey, he lay dar flat er his back an' tol' me all de news. I dunner how long I sot dar, rubbin' an' noddin', an' lis'nin' ter de Little

Marster, tellin' me all 'bout how de Nunitin' State of Americus, Georgy, come up, an' how he wuz skeer'd she wuz gwine down agin ef de folks up dar whar dey make laws did 'n' stop scandalizin' an' gwine on. I speck both un us must er drapt off ter sleep, kaze when I waked up, de candle had done burnt down. Bimeby de Little Marster say, 'Polly Ann'—he call me Polly Ann fer short—'Polly Ann, I smell smoke. What does you smell?'

"I say, 'I smells smoke, too. I speck somebody burnin' off a new groun'."

"He say, 'Polly Ann, dis ain't de time er de year when dey burns off de new groun'."

"I say, 'Maybe somebody possum huntin' drapt der torch an' sot fire to de woods."

"He say, 'Polly Ann, dis ain't de time er de year when dey hunts possums."

"I say, 'I dunner how come it den."

"He say, 'All de same, Polly Ann, I smells smoke."

"I say, 'Dat what Brer Fox say when Brer Rabbit put fire ter de hay what he totin' on his back."

"De Little Marster say, 'Polly Ann, maybe

somebody done put fire ter de hay what we got on our backs.'

"I say, 'I ain't skeer'd er dat.'

"Dis make him laugh. He say, 'Polly Ann, folks don't hafter be skeer'd ter git burnt up.'"

At this point Free Polly suddenly became very solemn. A heavy frown appeared on her face. Her voice fell to a tragic whisper. She placed one hand lightly on Sweetest Susan's shoulder and held the other to a gesture of warning, looking all around the room as if expecting to discover the beginning or the ending of some horrible catastrophe.

"Right dar an den," she said, "I not only smelt de smoke, I seed it. Seed it wid my own eyes. Yes, honey! A little streak un it, not much bigger dan a pipestem, come curlin' up by de candle an' went dancin' up ter de ceilin'. Den' way off yander, I hear somebody holler. Den somebody holler'd mo' closer. Den de cows 'gun ter low, an' de hosses ter whicker.

"I say ter myse'f, 'Nigger 'oman, you better keep yo' eye peeled, kaze sump'n n'er gwine on, an' 'tain't so mighty fur fum here, needer.' Den I hear somebody holler right out in de lot dar.

"De Little Marster say, 'Polly Ann, I tell you I smells smoke. Hit 's right off 'n de fire.'

"I say, 'I b'lieve you, honey.'

"By dis time, de fuss outside wuz gittin' wuss an' wuss, an' I could hear somep'n cracklin' like somebody walkin' thoo a patch er ragweed in de winter time. It look like de little candle got mo' paler, an' den it seem like I could see shadders dancin' on de wall. Den I happen to look up at de window, an', man, suh, de whole place wuz lit up.

"I say, 'Hey! ef de sun done riz up in de night, she shinin' mighty red.' De smoke keep on curlin' up an' curlin' up. It cum thoo de crack er de flo'.

"De Little Marster say, 'De smoke smell so bad, I got ter put my head un' de cover.'

"I say to myse'f, 'Look a-here, nigger 'oman, you better be up an' gwine, kaze when you see de smoke comin' up thoo de floor you better watch out.'"

"I'd 'a' gone down dem stairs faster 'n I come up," exclaimed Drusilla.

"Ef you had," said Free Polly, scornfully, "you'd 'a' never gone down any yuther steps—

an' dat would 'a' been des like a nigger fer de worl'. I ain't run down no steps. I des sot dar an' sorter pat de Little Marster on de leg fer ter keep him comp'ny, an' de smoke kep' on comin' wusser an' wusser. I say to myse'f, 'Watch out, nigger 'oman! Watch out!'

"Den I 'gun to strangle, an' I went ter de window, an' des 'bout dat time I hear mo' squallin' an' fussin' dan I ever been hear befo', an' time I got ter de window somebody smash it in, an' I des give one big squeal an' drapt on de flo'.

"Now, dat ar somebody wuz A'on. He clum de tree, he did, an' smash in de window, an' he wrop de Little Marster in de quilts an' coverleds what he had on him, an' toted him down de tree on one arm, an' den he come back an' toted me.

"When we got down, dar wuz a big crowd stannin' 'round, an' ol' Marster wuz a-cryin', an' A'on put me down an' went up in de crowd, an' when he got dar he fell down like he wuz dead. When he smash in de window, de glass cut him in de arm an' in de face an' he wuz bloodier dan a stuck pig. So dar he wuz, an' dar he lay. He des shet his eyes an' fell back like he done dead.

"Yes, honey! dar he wuz right in de middle



AARON TOTED HIM DOWN DE TREE

of a big crowd. All de niggers wuz dar fum five mile 'roun', an' mighty nigh all de white folks wuz dar. Ol' Mr. Gossett wuz dar wid his eyelids red, an' lookin' like dey been turn wrongsoudout-'ards. He walk up, he did, an' 'low —

“‘Aha! If I ain't mighty much mistaken, dat's my nigger, A'on. A'on, 'git up fum' dar, you gran' rascal.’

“But A'on ain't move. He des lay dar like he dead. Ol' Mr. Gossett knelt down by 'im, an' put his han' on him, an' felt 'im like de doctors does. Den he riz up an' look at A'on long time, an' den he shuck his head. He shuck his head, an' turn roun' an' holler to Ol' Marster : —

“‘Jedge, once 'pon a time I hear you say you want to buy dis nigger. What 'll you gimme fer 'im des ez he is?’

“‘Twelve hundred dollars!’ Ol' Marster holler'd back. He talk short an' sharp, like he talkin' to a fiel' han'.

“Ol' Mr. Gossett holler back, ‘Done!’

“Den Ol' Marster, bidout movin' in his tracks, tuck a long book out er his side pocket, an' pulled out five bills an' sont um to Mr. Gossett by one er de niggers.

"He say, 'Dat's a hunderd fer ter make de trade bindin'. Meet me in town ter-morrer, an' I'll pay you de rest.'

"Ol' Mr. Gossett say, 'But, Jedge, s'posin' de nigger is dead now?'

"Ol' Marster snap 'im short off: 'A trade's a trade. You stan' by yone, an' I'll stan' by mine.'

"Mr. Gossett say, 'Oh, I'll stan' by mine, Jedge. De nigger is yone, 'live or dead.'

"It look like ter me," continued Free Polly, shifting her position and talking in a less solemn tone, "dat A'on must 'a' been playin' possum. Kaze time he hear ol' Mr. Gossett say dat, he open his eyes an' riz up fum whar he wuz layin' at. He walk sorter weak, but he wa'n't hurted much. He got up an' went whar dey had de Little Marster, an' fum dat time on, de two stuck mighty close by one anudder. Whar you'd see one, you'd be mighty apt to see de udder. It was dat away all de time, fum Monday mornin' twell Sat'-day night.

"De Little Marster 'gun ter git well an' strong. Some say he grow'd an' got fatter. I can't tell you 'bout dat. He allers look mighty pale an' puny ter me, but dey ain't no 'sputin' dat he got



DE SQUINCH OWL LIGHTED ON A'ON'S HAND

'roun' on his crutches mo' soopler. He wuz ez nimble on dem crutches ez a game rooster is on his legs.

“ 'T wa'n't long atter dat 'fo' de niggers on de place wuz all fear'd er A'on. Dey seed all de creeturs a-follerin' 'im 'bout, an' dey got it spread 'roun' dat he wuz a cunjer-man, one er deze yer hoodoo folks what puts spells on you. Den dey got it spread 'roun' dat he want no nigger, kaze he don't do like niggers. I did n't blame 'em much fer bein' skeer'd, kaze one day, des atter sundown, I happen to see A'on lookin' up in de big pine out dar in de lot. I hear a squinch owl holler, an' den I hear A'on say sump'n. Time he do dat I see de squinch owl drap fum de top er de pine an' light right on A'on's han'. De bird sot dar, he did, an' pop his bill like a waggin whip, an' den he up an' flew'd away. He come right by my head, an' it's Lord's trufe, he ain't make no mo' fuss dan a fedder floatin' on de win'.

“ I wuz sorter skeer'd, but I walk right up to A'on an' say, 'Man, who is you, an' what is you?'

“ He turns 'roun' an' say, 'De Son of Ben Ali.'

“ I say, 'Thanky. I know mos' ez much now ez I did befo'.'

“Den he say, ‘Le’ me show you.’ Wid dat he holler, an’ de black hoss answer him. He holler agin, an’ de gray mar’ whicker. He holler once mo’, an’ de pony come a runnin’ an’ a whinnyin’.

“I say, ‘Man, le’ me go ’way fum here. I done hear talk er Ben Ali long ’fo’ I seed you.’”

XII.

THE ARMY MARCHES BY.

It was not long before the children saw another sight on that plantation. They forgot all about Mr. Thimblefinger and Mrs. Meadows and Mr. Rabbit. They forgot to talk to the animals. The war had been under way for some time, and one rainy day in November word came that two soldiers in blue had been seen riding along the road at a gallop. That was early in the morning. By noon the plantation fairly swarmed with the foragers in blue. The Union army was on its way from Atlanta to the sea.

Standing at the window and looking through the mist and rain, Buster John and Sweetest Susan could see the foraging parties running about collecting the cows and calves, the horses and the mules, and presently they saw the same men in blue driving the stock out through the avenue and into the public road. Sweetest Susan cried when she saw the old Gray Pony ambling

along with the rest, but Buster John never thought about the Pony at all. He was watching to see the Black Stallion pass by, and wondering how the men would manage him.

The children also saw many of the negroes following the soldiers off. They saw Aaron dressed in his Sunday best, and they wondered whether he was going with the rest. But after awhile they heard Aaron talking to their grandfather in the next room. They heard him say that he had tried to hide the horses and mules in the swamp, but some of the negroes had carried the foragers in blue to the hiding-place. They heard Aaron say that he had carried Timoleon to another part of the plantation, and that the old horse was not likely to be found. They heard their grandfather tell Aaron that he was now free to go where he might — that he was no longer a slave. To which Aaron replied that if he was free to go or stay, he would stay.

A little later the children, still standing at the window, or near it, heard a great clatter of hoofs in the avenue, mingled with the lowing of cattle, the neighing of horses, and the shouts and yells of drivers. At first Buster John and Sweetest Susan,



TWO SOLDIERS RODE ALONG

looking through the mist, could see nothing but a dense and moving mass of animals and men. But in a few moments they were surprised to see that the foragers in blue were bringing back the horses and cattle they had driven off. There was the old pony, ambling back to the lot ; there were the carriage horses ; and there were the milk cows and dry cattle. Accompanying the foragers, who were on foot, were two or three mounted men, and one of these wore a sword and was giving orders.

The grandfather, attracted by the children's cries of surprise, had come to the window, and he stood there gazing at the spectacle in a bewildered way. It was more surprising to him than it was to the children. He could make nothing of it. He could only rub his eyes and look. Here were his horses, his mules, and his cattle coming back in a hurry, driven by the soldiers in blue. He went to the rear porch to see what would be done with the stock, and there, to his further surprise, he saw a soldier on guard. The soldier saluted the white-haired old man with the utmost deference, standing at "present arms" until the gentleman, somewhat rusty in military etiquette, had

returned the salute. Then the soldier resumed his march back and forth.

Looking across to the lot, the old gentleman saw Aaron showing the foragers where to put the horses, the mules, and the cows, and with Aaron were two or three negroes who had refused to go off with the rest.

"What is the trouble here?" the old gentleman asked the soldier. "Are we prisoners?"

"No, sir," replied the soldier, laughing; "we are here to protect this house from the foragers and stragglers. I was thinkin' may be you're some close kin to Uncle Cump."

"Uncle who?"

"Uncle Cump, Cump — Tecump. We march by that name."

The white-haired gentleman, regarding this as a soldier's joke, went into the house. The children, still at the window, called attention to a soldier marching back and forth. Going on the front piazza, he saw a soldier marching on that side, and but for the garden fence doubtless there would have been a fourth soldier marching behind the kitchen.

Later in the afternoon a squad of riders came

galloping down the avenue. They drew up their horses at the yard gate, and one of them alighted, throwing his reins to one of the others. The children ran into the front parlor and peeped through the curtains. The soldier who had come into the yard had neither gun nor sword. He wore a heavy overcoat, and his spurs rattled as he stamped the mud and water from his boots. He removed his overcoat, lifted the knocker on the door and let it fall twice, and then walked back and forth on the piazza, with a quick, nervous step. He seemed to be restless and impatient.

The children's grandfather went to the door and threw it open. The soldier lifted his hat with a gesture that was more familiar than deferential.

"Come in, sir," said the grandfather. "We do not keep the door closed even on our enemies."

"I am here," remarked the soldier, curtly, "because I have a message for this house."

He had a quick, nervous way of talking, and his eyes ran from the carpet on the floor to the pictures on the wall. One of these pictures was the portrait of a little boy, pale and wan, and the top of a crutch peeped from behind his shoulder.

On this portrait the eyes of the soldier lingered, and he turned to it with a quick gesture. The children's grandfather stood watching him. The old gentleman's attitude was stiff and formal, and there was an expression of resentment on his face, for he recognized that the commander, the General of the Army of invasion, stood before him.

As for the soldier, his stiff red beard bristled, the lines in his weather-beaten face deepened, and his eyes sparkled. If he had noticed the attitude or expression of the other he ignored it.

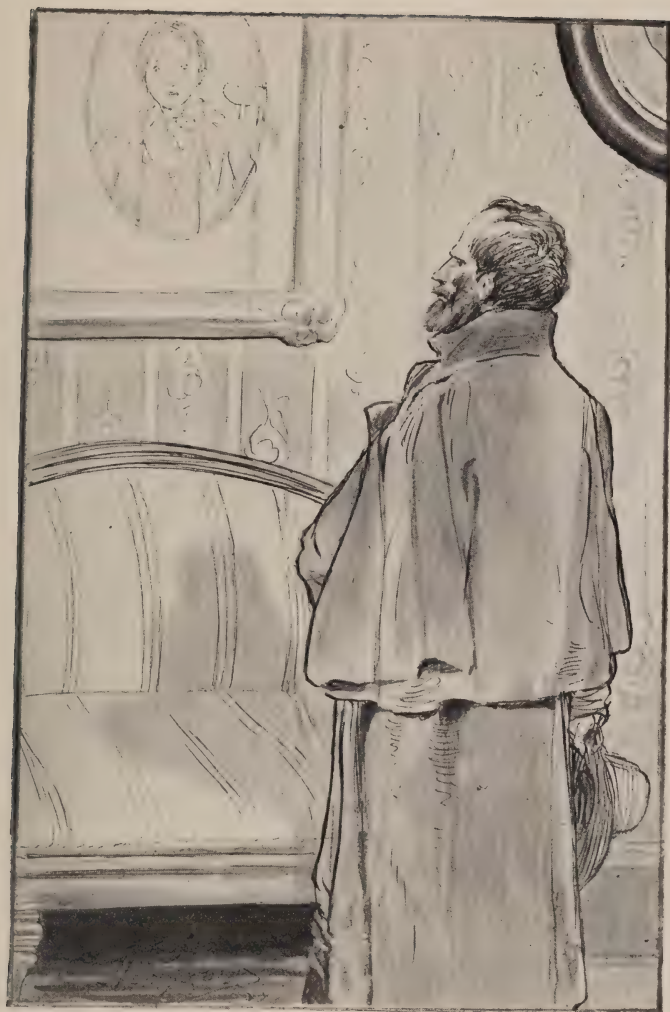
"That is Little Crotchet," he said, brusquely. "Where is he?"

The face of the children's grandfather softened and his whole attitude changed.

"Little Crotchet is not here now," he replied. He turned and walked to the window, which seemed to be blurred by the mist and the rain blown against it by the east wind.

The commander took a quick step forward and placed his hand gently on the grandfather's shoulder.

"I am sorry," he said. "I have a message for Little Crotchet."



HIS EYES LINGERED ON THE PORTRAIT

"If my son had lived," remarked the children's grandfather, by way of explanation, "he would be a grown man. As it is, he is still a little boy."

"That is curious, too," said the commander. "Since I heard of him, I have always thought of him as a little bit of a chap. Something like that." He turned to the portrait on the wall almost impatiently.

"I am forgetting myself," said the children's grandfather, holding out his hand, which the soldier seized and pressed in his quick, nervous way. "Sit in this rocking-chair near the hearth and dry yourself. You and I are old acquaintances. Years ago you passed through this part of the country on horseback, and stopped here over night."

"That is so," replied the commander. "I was just beginning the business of life. You had already begun it."

"To some extent. I was ahead of you, then, just as you have now outstripped me in the business of dealing out death and destruction."

The commander rose from his chair quick as a flash, and again placed his hand on the old gentleman's shoulder.

"My dear sir," he said, "this is war, and war is the most serious business that men can engage in."

He resumed his seat as suddenly as he had left it, throwing one leg across the other with an easy familiarity that was not at all displeasing to the elder man.

"You would think war was my business," remarked the commander, after a pause, during which his keen, restless eyes tried to solve the mysteries of the glowing coals; "but it is not. I am a school teacher. I had rather be yonder in Mississippi, training my college boys, than to be leading this army. But war is the price of union and peace, and here I am. Where is Aaron?"

"Aaron?" The question was so sudden and unexpected that the children's grandfather was taken by surprise.

"Was n't that the name of some queer negro you owned?"

"Certainly. I will call him," replied the grandfather.

At that moment there was a rap at the door, and Aaron opened it. He bowed as he saw the

uniformed and booted stranger, and then proceeded to make his report. He told his master that all the horses, mules, and cattle had been brought back, and some more besides. He stood, half smiling, in an easy and yet an expectant attitude.

"This is Aaron," said the commander. "I must take him by the hand." He stepped across the floor with arm extended and clasped Aaron's hand in his. "You are a good man, Aaron," he remarked, "a good man. I want to read you something."

The commander fumbled in the breast pocket of his coat and drew forth a huge morocco memorandum book. From this he took a letter.

"This," he said, "was sent to me in cipher from the War Department at Washington. I have had it translated and written out. Do you remember a man named Hudspeth?"

"Perfectly," said the old gentleman.

"Mighty well," said Aaron.

"Well, this man, Richard Hudspeth, is one of the most influential members of Congress. He is on the Military Committee of the House. Here is what he says :

“DEAR GENERAL, — As a member of the Committee on Military Affairs, it has come to my ears that you will before long swing loose from Atlanta and march across Georgia, either to Savannah or Augusta. Should my information be correct, I have a favor to ask of you. It is this: that, so far as is consistent with your duties as a soldier, you will protect the lives and property of the people whom you may find on the Abercrombie place in Middle Georgia. You cannot miss the place. Whether you go to Savannah or Augusta, it will be in your line of march. It is in the very heart of Georgia, and is known far and wide.

“I am not sure that the people I knew are living there now; but I am very sure that I spent some very happy and some very miserable days there. It was in the days of the years of my youth, and I should have been more miserable still but for the kindness of the people on that place.

“More than that, I owe them my life, which at one time I was on the point of losing at the hands of some of the neighborhood ruffians. Some day when we meet in Washington you shall have the particulars.

“You will find on that place, I trust — though he seemed too frail to live long — a youngster known as Little Crotchet. Say to him that I shall love him tenderly while life lasts. I hope you will also find there the kindly gentleman to whose patience and courtesy I owe many a pleasant hour. I hope, too, you will find Aaron there — Aaron the fugitive, who was and who remains a mystery.

“For the sake of these people and for the sake of old times, I venture to ask you to surround the place with such protection as may be consistent with duties which at this distance I can only have a vague conception of.

“Meanwhile, the few of us who have had hints of the adventure you are about to undertake are trembling with fear and hope. We confide in your genius, but we should be happier if we had already heard from you at the end of your journey.

Faithfully yours,

“RICHARD HUDSPETH.”

The children's grandfather gazed steadily in the fire without moving. The commander placed the letter in his pocket, and rose from his chair, pushing it away from him impatiently.

"And this is Aaron?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied Aaron.

"Well, Aaron, I want to shake your hand again."

Aaron took the proffered hand and bowed his head over it, as if giving silent utterance to a prayer. The commander gave his hand to the White-haired Master, passed out upon the veranda, and so to where he had left his orderlies. He leaped into the saddle, turned and waved an adieu, and then the small cavalcade went clattering up the avenue.

Somewhere in the distance Buster John and Sweetest Susan heard a band playing a sweet tune, and so War passed out of their sight — passed out of their sight, let us hope, forever. But it should be recorded here that the spectacle of these slow-moving files of armed men, this vast procession of cavalry and artillery, with all their lumbering accompaniments, was far more amazing to these children than anything they had seen and heard in Mr. Thimblefinger's queer country, or than any of their experience with the Son of Ben Ali.

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